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THE ORCHARD BOOKS

XVI.: *The Ascent of the Mind to God*

Bellarmino, Roberto Francisco
Romolo, Saint, 1542-1621.

THE ASCENT OF THE MIND TO GOD

BY A LADDER OF THINGS CREATED

By

B. ROBERT BELLARMINE, S.J.

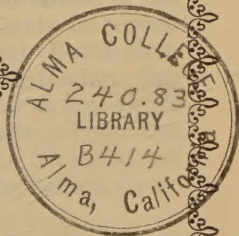
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JAMES BRODRICK, S.J.



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INTRODUCTION

THE man who wrote the spiritual classic here presented to the reader in its first English translation was born in a little hill-town of Tuscany called Montepulciano, on the Feast of St Francis of Assisi, 1542. Michelangelo, Galileo, and other distinguished contemporaries of his were allowed to retain the pleasant final o's of their names in the speech of these islands because the practical, fighting British of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were not interested in statues or the stars. But they were desperately interested in religious controversy, and Bellarmino, being the greatest of Rome's defenders, was soon as well known in England as any native champion of the Reformation. That was why he lost the final syllable of his name and became famous in our midst as Bellarmine or Bellarmyne.

During his early years, it did not seem in the least likely that he would become a great writer or master of controversy. It was in the pulpit that he won his first laurels, shortly after his entrance into the Society of Jesus,

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when he and it were both still in their teens. At the age of twenty-one, seven years from his priesthood, he was delivering sermons in the Duomo of Florence to select and learned audiences. The great churches of Padua, Venice, and Genoa heard him too, and then followed seven years of oratorical triumphs at the northern centre of Catholic culture, Louvain. A selection of these sermons was afterwards published, and from them much is to be learned about their author.

He was a frail little man, bothered and burdened from childhood with poor health, but gifted in compensation with a very stout heart, a clear, sharp intellect, and a wonderful memory. With little or no help from others, hampered by continual headaches, and in the midst of the thousand distractions of his work as a schoolmaster and preacher, he fashioned himself before he was forty years old into one of the finest all-round scholars of his century. The Louvain sermons show us a pulpit orator of a type exceedingly rare in that age, a man who seems to know the whole Bible by heart, so often does he quote it and to such good purpose, who has Hebrew and Greek at his finger-tips, and to whom the vast literature of the Fathers and the no less voluminous records of ancient and modern heresy are as familiar as the house in which he was born.

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But the Louvain sermons reveal something more and better than his mere learning. It was not the love of it, but the love of God that led him late each night

“ Back to his studies, fresher than at first,
Fierce as a dragon.”

The religious rebels of the sixteenth century were learned men, and Bellarmine, ever sensitive where the interests of the Church were at stake, quickly realized that the evil they had done could best be treated by the spiritual “homeopathy” of learning pro-founder than their own.

In 1576, at the age of thirty-four, he was recalled from Belgium to lecture on controversial theology at the famous Roman College, which soon afterwards became known as the Gregorian University. The majority of his students were Englishmen and Germans. So celebrated did the young professor’s “course” become that, before ever he published a line of it, the greatest of Elizabethan divines, William Whitaker of Cambridge, was writing anxiously about him to the High Treasurer of England. It is impossible to say anything in this place about the amazing reception that was accorded his grand old folios when at length they appeared. They marked a decisive turning point in the great religious debate, and

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for hundreds of years continued to be regarded by Protestants and Catholics alike as the most complete and satisfactory defence of the Church's claims that had ever been published. So familiar did Blessed Robert's name become in this country, that playwrights made use of it as a topical allusion in their comedies. One doggerel song, popular on the London stage, had a verse beginning:

" First to breakfast, then to dine
Is to conquer Bellarmine. . . ."

And not only his name, but his features became well known in England, as they were moulded in mockery on the beer jugs of the period. Specimens of these "Gray-beards" or "Bellarmine" are to be seen in most museums.

Fynes Moryson, a daring young Cambridge graduate, paid a visit to Rome in 1594, "to see the monuments, especially those which were living, and among them himsele (Bellarmine) most especially." Fynes was a Protestant, and felt nervous in the Eternal City, but he tells us that before leaving he "had an obstinate purpose to see Bellarmine . . . this man so famous for his learning, and so great a champion of the Popes." He found Blessed Robert, who received him most graciously, to be "leane

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of body and something lowe of stature, with a long visage and a little sharpe bearde upon the chin of a browne colour, and a countenance not very grave."

The "countenance not very grave" is an interesting little touch. Blessed Robert, as the Pope said when making him a Cardinal in 1599, might have "no equal for learning in the Church of God," but he carried his learning so lightly that it was difficult to believe he possessed it. To his intimates he was best known for the merriment, the *santa allegressa* of his conversation, and, dreadful to tell, for his incorrigible habit of making puns. Once, when some distinguished people began to complain in his presence about the Pope's lavish expenditure on grand edifices, he made them laugh and stop their uncharitable chatter by remarking: "*Veramente*, he is a highly edifying Pope." Few learned men have had such a genius for making friends as this light-hearted scholar whom a distinguished Cardinal dubbed "*il maggior piccolo che sia al mondo*"—the greatest little man in the world. Baronius and he were like two brothers. There was something delightfully school-boyish in their affection for each other which led them, at least once, to engineer an elaborate practical joke. The day after the death of the Oratorian Cardinal, Blessed

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Robert gave his usual monthly exhortation to his household. Soon after beginning to speak, he chanced to mention his friend's name, and thereupon burst into such a flood of tears that he was unable to continue and had to abandon the exhortation altogether.

Another man who held a special place in our Cardinal's heart was St Francis de Sales. St Francis was only one of hundreds who turned to him again and again in their difficulties, with a confidence born of long experience. Once the Saint wrote to him: "If all poor men weighed down with debts and troubles turn to you as to a haven of refuge, you have only yourself to blame for being the kind of man you are." Indeed, to be poor or sad was to have Blessed Robert at one's feet. No Saint in the Calendar gave of his time and his resources with more lavish generosity in the relief of human distress. He literally beggared himself for the sake of the needy. For them he pawned nearly every article of furniture in his house, his episcopal ring, the very mattress of his bed. One of his few purple robes went to make a frock for a poor lady who appealed to him. After his death, the Pope had to pay for his coffin as there was nothing in his account at the bank. No wonder the Roman populace christened him "the Father of the poor," and "the new Poverello."

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Their instinct was right in more senses than one. As already mentioned, he was born on the Feast of St Francis, and his second baptismal name was that of the gentle Umbrian saint. All through his long life he was most tenderly devoted to this beloved patron. In his sermons and spiritual writings the Poverello had a place apart, and was brought in as a witness or an example oftener even than his own Father in God, St Ignatius. Men who knew him intimately avowed that the chief trait of his soul was the same sublime "childlikeness" that had given the life of Francis its unearthly charm. In him, too, was the love of music and all natural beauty. He could sing and play well, and he wrote one of the finest hymns in the Breviary. It was in the fitness of things, then, that he should die on September 17, the day that he desired, because on it the Church commemorates the vision of Alvernia. The year of his death was 1621, when he was almost seventy-nine years old.

The little book to which these few random notes about its author are an introduction was published in Latin in 1615, the version here reissued being "Translated into English by T. B. Gent.," and "Printed at Doway, *Anno Domini* 1616"; but all attempts to identify the translator have failed. It

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was Blessed Robert's custom to make a month's retreat at the Jesuit novitiate in Rome during the September of each year. That was his holiday. While engaged with God he never forgot the needs of his fellow-men, and each retreat from 1614 until the year of his death resulted in a little spiritual treatise, which was afterwards given to the printers. It was thus that his books, *The Eternal Happiness of the Saints*, *The Mourning of the Dove*, *The Seven Words*, and *The Art of Dying Well*, came into existence.

It is not necessary to say very much about the first of the series, *The Ascent of the Mind to God*. Blessed Robert liked to call it his "Benjamin," because he "wrote it in his old age." The christening of "Benjamin" gave him some trouble. His favourite analogy of life as a pilgrimage would, perhaps, have led him to put *The Itinerary of the Mind to God* on his title-page had not St Bonaventure already monopolized the words. It was plain to him that the fifteen steps of his ladder were not all as evenly disposed, one above another, as the steps of a good ladder ought to be. Man, the microcosm, is naturally the first step. This world within a world is studied according to its causes, the four causes of Aristotle and scholasticism. Then follows in five eloquent chapters a finely reasoned development of

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the words *Homo creatus est*, which stand at the beginning of the *First Principle and Foundation* of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius.

Having considered the microcosm, the Cardinal turns his thoughts to the macrocosm, or great world of inanimate nature, and expatiates in five more chapters on the vastness, multitude, variety, power, and beauty of created things. With the third step the metaphor of the ladder becomes blurred. Instead of "going up higher," Blessed Robert stops to examine separately the mysteries and marvels of the universe, finding in them symbols of the relation of man to his Maker, and also opportunities, which he seized with avidity, to preach his favourite sermon on the duty of giving alms.

His seventh step takes him out into space to muse on the sun, moon, and stars. Throughout his life he was always keenly interested in astronomy, but, as his reflections on the sun show, he did not become a very scientific astronomer. In this connection the story of his dealings with Galileo has a special fascination, but it is impossible to say anything about them in this place. Of one thing the reader can rest assured, and it is that, however obsolete the science of this book, however uncertain its general scheme, the spiritual lessons conveyed lose

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little or nothing of their force. Each step is in itself a compendium of holy wisdom. Blessed Robert's aim was to make men more prayerful, to infuse into their busy lives the spirit of contemplation. Like his Father, St Ignatius, he was himself in eminent measure "an active contemplative"—*in actione contemplativus*—and he conceived, in his love for God, the dear ambition of helping the rest of the world to climb into the peace which he had attained. If read slowly and devoutly, a chapter at a time, his book will reveal its secret of consolation and enfranchisement, making manifest "the traffic of Jacob's ladder, pitched between heaven" and any cross whatever that a man or woman is called upon to bear.

J. BRODRICK, S.J.



THE TRANSLATOR

TO THE READER

AT the request of one that might command, I took in hand the translation of this book. The subject thereof is the *summum bonum*, or Highest Happiness of this life; for it teacheth us a compendious way by the steps of creatures to ascend unto the Creator, and now on earth to be linked to him in love, that hereafter in heaven we may be united to him in glory. Of the author's worth I will say with Sallust beginning the description of the city Carthage: *De Carthagine silere melius puto, quam parum dicere*. But if virtue and truth appear best apparelled when they are most naked, then are they here set forth in their holiday attire. Divine and human philosophy also, like the sun and moon in one hemisphere, shine here both together, and cast their beams upon all that are desirous to receive *light* or life from their heat. If I have committed any negligence in the action of my part, I desire thy friendly censure, and to remember that

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Voces Artis, of which there are many in this book, are strangers to our language, and cannot be made denizens but by prescription. . *Vale*.



THE AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THE Holy Scripture doth admonish us to seek God diligently.* For although God is not far from every one of us, *For in him we live and move and are,*† saith the Apostle; yet we are far from God, so that unless we daily dispose our hearts to ascend and make for ourselves a *ladder* unto heaven, and with great labour seek God, we shall with the Prodigal Son, *feed swine in a country far off from our Father and home.*‡

And that we may briefly declare how these things may stand together, to wit, that God is not far from us; and yet we are far from him; we say that God is not far from us because he always seeth us, before whose eyes all things are present; he always thinketh of us, because *he hath care of us;*§ he always toucheth us, because *he upholdeth all things by the word of his power.*|| But we are far from God, because we see not God, neither can we see him, for he *inhabiteth light in-*

* Deut. iv 29, 1 Paralip. xvi 11, Ps. lxxviii 33, Isa. lv 6, Ps. civ 4, etc.

† Acts xvii 28.

§ 1 Pet. v 7.

‡ Luke xv 15.

|| Heb. i 3.

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*accessible;** neither are we *sufficient to think anything of ourselves, as of ourselves;†* much less are we able to touch him, and cleave to him with pious affection, unless his right hand receive and draw us unto him. And therefore *David*, when he had said: *My soul hath stuck close to thee,‡* presently added, *thy right hand hath received me.‡* Neither are we only far from God because we cannot see him, nor easily think of him, nor with affection cleave unto him; but also because being busied about temporal goods, with the which we are encompassed and overwhelmed, we very easily forget God, and with a dry heart we scarcely with our tongue sound his name in Psalms and sacred prayer.

This, therefore, is the cause why the Holy Ghost doth in Sacred Writ (as we said even now) so often admonish us to seek God: *Seek God and your soul shall live;§* and, *seek his face evermore;||* and, *the Lord is good to them that hope in him, to the soul that seeketh him;¶* and, *seek ye the Lord while he may be found;*** and, *seek him in simplicity of heart;††* and, *when thou shalt seek there the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him: yet so, if thou seek him with all thy heart.‡‡*

* 1 Tim. vi 6.

‡ Ps. lxii 9. § Ps. lxxviii. 33.

¶ Lam. iii 25.

†† Wisd. i 1.

† Cor. iii 5.

|| Ps. civ 4.

** Isa. lv 6.

‡‡ Deut. iv 29

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But although this diligence in seeking God belongeth unto all the faithful, yet it most properly appertaineth unto the Prelates of the Church, as St Augustine, St Gregory, St Bernard, and other holy Fathers do witness. For they plainly write that a Prelate cannot profit both himself and others unless he diligently apply himself unto the meditation of divine matters and the reparation of his own mind. St Augustine, in his books of the City of God, saith: *The love of truth seeketh holy rest : the necessity of Charity undertaketh just business ; but neither is the delight of truth to be altogether forsaken, lest the sweetness thereof being withdrawn, the necessity of business oppress.** And the same St Augustine, speaking in his Confessions of himself and of his frequent meditation of God by creatures, saith: *I often do this : it delighteth me, and when I can be spared from my necessary business, I have recourse unto this pleasure.†* St Gregory, in his book of Pastoral Charge, saith: *Let a Prelate be equal unto any in compassion, and before all in contemplation, that through the bowels of piety he may transfer the infirmities of others unto himself, and by the height of contemplation in seeking after things invisible, he may exceed himself.‡* And St Gregory, in

* 19 De Civ., 19.

† 10 Conf., c. 40.

‡ 2 Reg. Pastor., 5.

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the same place, bringeth the example of Moses and Christ. For Moses often went into the Tabernacle and came out; he went in that he might contemplate God's secrets; he came out that he might bear with the infirmities of his neighbours. And Christ himself in the day-time, by preaching and working miracles, sought the salvation of his neighbours, but the night he passed over without sleep in prayer and contemplation. *For he passed (saith St Luke) the whole night in the prayer of God.** Many things also like unto these may be read in the last chapter of the same book.

Moreover, St Bernard, to admonish seriously Pope Eugenius, who was formerly his scholar, not to give himself wholly to action, but some time every day to recollect himself, and to enjoy holy rest and heavenly food, wrote five books of consideration, in the which he doth not only exhort him unto the daily meditation of divine things, but also doth plainly teach him the manner and method how to meditate, and by meditation to ascend, and by ascension to unite himself unto God in understanding and affection. Neither doth he admit that excuse which he might have pretended, and which many nowadays pretend; to wit, that the over-many businesses wherewith the office of a

* Luke vi 12.

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Bishop is accompanied, would not afford him leisure enough to apply himself to the meditation of divine things. For truly no one ought to give himself so wholly to outward businesses, but that he may take some time to strengthen his body with meat, drink, and sleep. And if the body do duly require this refection and rest, with how much more reason doth the soul require her meat and rest? Neither can she without this refection truly execute her office by any means, amidst the encumbrances of so many great affairs. But the meat of the soul is prayer, and her rest is contemplation, by the which Ascensions are framed in the heart, that the *God of Gods shall be seen in Sion*;^{*} as much as in this vale of tears he may be seen.

But we mortal men (as it seemeth) can find no other ladder whereby to ascend unto God, but by the works of God. For those who by the singular gift of God have (by another way) been admitted into Paradise to hear God's secrets, which it is not lawful for a man to speak, are not said to have ascended, but to have been wrapt. Which St Paul doth plainly confess of himself, when he saith he *was caught up into Paradise and heard secret words which it is not granted to man to utter*.†

And that a man may by the works of God,

^{*} Ps. lxxxiii 8.

† 2 Cor. xii 4.

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that is by creatures, ascend unto the knowledge and love of the Creator, the book of Wisdom doth teach,* and the Apostle to the Romans,† and reason itself doth sufficiently confirm, since the efficient cause may be known by the effects, and the example by the image; neither can there be any doubt, but that all creatures are the works of God, and that man and angels are not only his works, but also his images, as the holy Scripture teacheth us.

I therefore, being moved by these reasons, having obtained some small respite from public affairs, and admonished by the example of St Bonaventura, who, in a like respite, wrote a book entitled *The Pilgrimage of the Mind unto God*, have essayed from the contemplation of creatures, to make a ladder by the which we may in some sort ascend unto God. And I have divided it into fifteen steps, in resemblance of the fifteen steps by which they went up into the Temple of Solomon, and of the fifteen Psalms which are called Graduals.

* Wisd. xiii 4, 5 *et seq.*

† Rom. i 20.



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THE ASCENT OF THE MIND TO GOD

THE FIRST STEP FROM THE CONSIDERATION OF MAN

CHAPTER I

THE COMMON CAUSES OF THIS CONSIDERA- TION

IF anyone truly desire to erect a ladder unto God, he ought to begin from the consideration of himself. For every one of us is both the creature and image of God, and nothing is nearer to us than ourselves.

Therefore not without cause Moses saith *Attende tibi* (*Attend to thyself*), upon which two words Basil the Great wrote an excellent sermon.* For he that shall truly behold himself, and consider what is within him, shall find as it were an abridgement of the whole world, whereby he may easily ascend unto the Maker of all things.

* *Hom. III, In illud, Attende tibi ipsi. LXX*
πρόσεχε σεαυτῷ.

But I at this present intend to seek out nothing else but the four common causes: Who is my maker? Of what matter he made me? What form he gave me? And to what end he produced me? For if I seek my maker, I shall find him only God; if I seek the matter whereof he made me, I shall find it nothing; whence I gather, whatsoever is in me is made by God, and the whole to be of God; if I seek my form, I shall find myself to be the image of God; if I seek my end, I shall find that the same God is my chief and total happiness. Therefore I may understand there is so great a conjunction and nearness of myself with God, that he only is my maker, my author, my Father, my example, my happiness, and my All. And if I understand this, how can it be but that I should most ardently seek him? think of him? sigh for him? desire to see and to embrace him? and detect the great blindness of my heart which so long time hath desired, sought, or thought of nothing less than of God, who only is All unto me?

CHAPTER II

GOD OUR CREATOR

BUT let us consider more diligently every particular: I ask thee, O my soul, who gave thee being whenas a little time before thou

wast nothing? Surely the parents of thy flesh begot thee not; for what is born of flesh is flesh;* but thou art a spirit. Neither did heaven nor earth or the sun or stars produce thee; for those are bodies, thou without body. Nor yet could angels, arch-angels, or any other spiritual creature be causes of thy being, for thou art not made of any matter, but created of nothing. And *none but God Almighty can make something of nothing.*

He therefore alone, without companion, without help, with his own hands, which are his understanding and will, created thee when he pleased.

But perhaps not God, but creatures produced thy body, that, as thy soul must acknowledge God, so thy body must acknowledge thy parents for authors. It is not so, for although God uses the means of parents to beget the flesh, as inferior workmen in the building of a house, yet is he the chief Builder, Author, and true Father both of the soul and body, and so would be said to be the beginning of man's whole essence. For if the parents of thy flesh were the true authors, and as it were the chief framers of thy body, they would know how many muscles, veins, sinews, bones; how many humours, how many turnings,

* John iii 6.

and how many other things of like kind there are in man's body, all of which they are ignorant of, unless, perhaps, they have learned them by the art of anatomy.

Moreover, when the body is sick, or a member withered or cut off, they could certainly, by the same art by which they made it, again repair it, if they were the true authors; even as those which make clocks or build houses, know how to order and repair them. But parents know not how to do any of these things. The conjunction also of the soul with the body, which is a special part of the affection of man's nature, can be done by none but by a workman of infinite power. For by what art but by divine can a spirit be joined with flesh in so near a bond as to be made our substance? For the body hath no proportion or likeness with the spirit. He therefore did it, *who alone doth great wonders*.*

Truly, therefore, doth the Holy Ghost speak by Moses in Deuteronomy. *Is not he thy father, that hath possessed thee and made thee and created thee?*† And by Job: *Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh, thou hast put me together with bones and sinews.*‡ And by the kingly Prophet: *Thy hands have made me and formed me;*§ and again: *Thou hast*

* Ps. cxxxv 4.

‡ Job x 11.

† Deut. xxxii 6.

§ Ps. cxviii 73.

*formed me and hast laid thy hand upon me.**
 And the most wise Mother of the Machabean children: *I know not how you were formed in my womb: for I neither gave you breath, nor soul, nor life: neither did I frame the limbs of every one of you. But the Creator of the world that formed the nativity of man and that found out the origin of all.†*

Hereupon surely the wisdom of God, Christ our Lord said: *Call none your father upon earth: for one is your father, who is in heaven.‡*

By which admonition St *Augustine* said to God of his son *Adeodatus*, whom he had begot in fornication: *Thou didst make him well, but I beside sin had nothing in that child.§*

Go to now, my soul, if God be thy Author, and thy body's also; if he be thy Father, Supporter and Nurse; if what thou art is of him, if what thou hast thou receivest of him; and what thou hopest, thou expectest from him; why dost thou not glory in such a parent? Why dost thou not love him with all thy heart? Why dost thou not for his sake condemn all earthly things? Why dost thou suffer vain desires to overrule thee? Lift up thine eyes to him, fear not thine enemies on earth, since thou hast a Father

* Ps. cxxxviii 5.

† 2 Mach. vii 22, 23.

‡ Matt. xxiii 9.

§ 9 Conf., c. 6.

Almighty in heaven. With what confidence and affection (thinkest thou) did David say: *I am thine. Save thou me.** O my soul, if thou wouldst consider that the almighty and everlasting God (who wanteth none of thy goods, and if thou perish he loseth nothing) turneth not his eyes from thee, but so loveth, protecteth, directeth, and cherisheth thee, as if thou wert his greatest treasure; surely thou wouldst only hope in him, thou wouldst fear him as thy Lord, and love him as thy Father; neither should any temporal good or evil separate thee from his love.

CHAPTER III

GOD HATH CREATED MAN OUT OF NOTHING

LET us come to the matter whereof man is made. Truly it is most base; but it giveth us thereby the greater occasion to humble ourselves, which is a virtue in this life very profitable and rare, and therefore the more precious and to be desired. And surely of the matter of our bodies there can be no doubt, but that it is *that Nothing*, than the which what can be imagined more vacant and vile? The immediate matters of the body, what is it but menstruous blood? A thing so impure, as our eyes refuse to see, our hands to touch, and our minds to

* Ps. cxviii 94.

think of. The matter whereof the first man was made, what was it but red and barren earth, or dust and slime? *The Lord God formed man of the slime of the earth.** And again, God said to man: *Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return.†* Wherefore the Patriarch Abraham, remembering his unworthiness, said unto God: *Seeing I have once begun, I will speak to my Lord, whereas I am dust and ashes.‡* But yet here is not an end of the baseness of this matter; for that dust or slime proceeded not from another matter, but from nothing. In the beginning God created heaven and earth, and surely not of another heaven or earth, but of nothing: so that whether we consider the soul or body, it is reduced to *nothing*, from whence this proud creature man proceeded. He hath nothing therefore to boast of, but what he received from God. Truly the works of man, which proceed either from wit or labour, have ever somewhat of themselves, whereof if they had understanding, they might glory against their maker. For a vessel of gold, a chest of wood, a house of ivory or marble, could they but speak, might say to him that made them: To thee I owe my form but not my matter, and that is more precious which I have from myself

* Gen. ii 7.

† Gen. iii 19.

‡ Gen. xviii 27.

than what I received from thee. But man, who hath nothing from himself, nor is anything of himself, cannot glory in anything. And most truly saith the Apostle: *If any man think himself to be something, whereas he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.** And: *What hast thou that thou hast not received? And if thou hast received, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?*† Whereunto St Cyprian agreeth when he saith: (*In nullo gloriandum quando nostrum nihil est*) *We must glory in nothing, since nothing is ours.*‡ But thou wilt say, men do many worthy works, for which they are deservedly praised, that virtue praised may increase. It is so, but let the glory be to God, not to themselves, as it is written: *He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.*§ And *In the Lord shall my soul be praised.*|| For I ask, when a man doth some excellent work, of what matter doth he make it? By what strength, and by whose direction and help doth he it? Surely of a matter which God and not man created, and by that virtue which God gave unto him, and not he to himself. By God's direction and help also he doth it, without which man could do no good. For, as it is said in the second Arausican Council: *For*

* Gal. vi 3.

† 1 Cor. iv 7.

‡ Cypr., *Testimonia ad Quirin.* lib. iii, c. 4.

§ 2 Cor. x 17.

|| Ps. xxxiii 3.

*God doth many good things in man without man ; but man doth no good which God doth not cause man to do.** God, therefore, doth vouchsafe to use the ministry of man in doing good, the which he could do without him, that man may thereby acknowledge himself more indebted unto God, and not be proud of himself, but glory in our Lord.†

Therefore, my soul, if thou be wise, sit down always in the lowest place; steal not God's glory, neither in little nor in much; descend to thy nothing, which only is thine, and all the world cannot make thee proud. But because this precious virtue of humility was almost gone out of the world, and not to be found either in the books of philosophers or in the manners of the peoples; the master of humility came from heaven, and *who being in the form of God, emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, and humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death.‡* And to mankind he said: *Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart, and you shall find rest to your souls.§* Wherefore, my soul, if perhaps thou art ashamed to imitate the humility of man, be not ashamed to imitate the humility

* Conc. Arausic. II (529), or second of Orange, can. 20.

† Wisd. x. 12, 20.

‡ Phil. ii 6-8.

§ Matt. xi 29.

of God, who deceiveth not, nor can be deceived, and who *resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble.**

CHAPTER IV

MAN WAS CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF
GOD

IT followeth now that we consider the form which is the third cause. And truly by how much the matter whereof man is made is more base; by so much the form given to man is more excellent. I omit the outward shape of his body which surpasseth all earthly living creatures in feature; yet this is not his substantial but accidental form. For his substantial form which maketh him a man distinguished from other living creatures, is his immortal soul endowed with reason and free will, which is God's Image, made to his own likeness.

For we read that God said when he made man: *Let us make man to our image and likeness; and let him have dominion over the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the air, and the beasts, and the whole earth, and every creeping creature that moveth upon the earth.*† Man, therefore, is God's image, not because of his body, but of his soul; for God is a spirit, not a body. And *there is the image*

* Jas. iv 6.

† Gen. i 26.

*of God (saith St Basil) where that is which commandeth other living creatures.** But man commandeth over beasts, not by the members of the body, the which are stronger in many beasts than in man, but by his mind endowed with reason and freewill. For not by that which he hath common with them doth he rule them; but by that whereby he is distinguished from them and made like unto God.

Lift up thy mind, my soul, to thy example, and remember that the chief commendation of the Image is to be like thereto. For although the example be deformed (as the Devil is usually made), yet the commendation of the Image is aptly to represent this deformed example. Therefore deformity in the example shall still be deformity, but in the Image it shall be beauty. And if the example also shall be beautiful, the Image shall be most precious, if it imitate (as near as may be) the beauty thereof. The Image likewise, if it had understanding, would desire nothing more than continually to behold the example, to fashion and frame itself to become most like thereunto.

Thy example, O my soul, is God, an infinite beauty, a light in which there is no darkness,† whose beauty the sun and moon admire. That thou mayest therefore the

* *In Hexaem.* Hom. X.

† 1 John i 5.

more easily imitate an example of such beauty and desire as much as thou canst to be like him, wherein consisteth thy highest perfection, profit, honour, joy, rest, and happiness, consider that the beauty of God thy example consisteth in Wisdom and Holiness. For as the beauty of the body ariseth from proportion of its members and an amiable colour, so in the beauty of the mind, an amiable colour is the light of Wisdom, and the proportion of members is justice; but by justice no particular virtue is understood, but that universal one which comprehendeth all virtue. That soul, therefore, is most beautiful whose mind doth shine with the light of wisdom, and whose will is confirmed in the fullness of perfect justice. But, O my soul, I say, that God thy example is Wisdom and Justice, and therefore beauty itself. And because this twofold goodness is signified by the name of Holiness in the Scriptures, therefore in Isaiah the angels cry unto God, *Holy, Holy, Holy, the Lord God of hosts.** And God himself crieth unto his Images, *I am the Lord your God. Be holy because I am holy.*† And our Lord in the Gospel: *Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect.*‡

If, therefore, thou desirest, O my soul, as the true image of God, to be like thy example,

* Isa. vi 3.

† Lev. xi 44.

‡ Matt. v 48.

thou must love Wisdom and Justice before all things. It is true wisdom to judge all things according to the highest cause; the highest cause is the will of God, or the law which doth make known the will of God unto men. Therefore if thou lovest wisdom, thou must not in any wise give care what the law of the flesh doth teach, what the senses do esteem, what the world doth approve, what thy kinsfolks persuade, and much less what flatterers propound; but be deaf unto them all, and only attend the will of thy Lord God, judging that to be wholly good, profitable, glorious and desirable, which is according thereunto. This is the wisdom of saints whereof the wise man writeth: *I loved her above health and beauty, and chose to have her instead of light : for her light cannot be put out. Now all good things came to me together with her.**

Moreover, justice is another part of spiritual beauty, and comprehendeth all virtues which adorn and perfect the will, but especially charity, the mother and root of all virtues. Whereof St Augustine, in his last book of nature and grace, speaketh thus: *Unperfect charity is unperfect justice : charity increased, is justice increased ; perfect charity is perfect justice.*† For he that loveth hath

* Wisd. vii 10, 11.

† *De nat. et grat.*, c. 70, No. 84

*fulfilled the law** because *love worketh no evil*,* and therefore *love is the fulfilling of the law.*†

And again, *he that keepeth his word*, to wit, his commandments, *in him in very deed the charity of God is perfected,*‡ as St John speaketh. Those, therefore, who will be like the divine example, ought to obey him that saith: *Be ye therefore followers of God, as most dear children, and walk in love.*‡

O my soul, that thou wouldst truly understand these things, and be like thy example in beauty of true Wisdom and Justice; then shouldst thou please the eyes of the highest king; how great peace then shouldst thou enjoy! How wouldst thou rejoice! How quickly wouldst thou condemn all worldly delights! And, on the other side, if thou wouldst consider how greatly God is offended to see his image destitute of the light of Wisdom, and beauty of Justice, to be polluted, defiled, and darkened, and man that was placed in such honour as to be like unto God, *now to be compared to senseless beasts, and become like to them.*§ Surely thou couldst not but quake, tremble, and be unquiet, until thou hadst washed away all thy spots with floods of tears flowing from deep contrition, and speedily return to the likeness of thy most beautiful example. But

* Rom. xiii 8, 10.

† Eph. v 1, 2.

‡ 1 John ii 5.

§ Ps. xlvi 13.

because, whilst thou art a pilgrim on earth and dost *walk by faith and not by sight*,* thou dost continually want the help of thy Lord God, as well to remain in the likeness thou hast already, as also daily to become more like, that is, more bright and beautiful; sigh, therefore, from the bottom of thy heart to God, and say unto him: O holy and most merciful Lord, whom it hath pleased to make this my soul thine Image, make perfect, I beseech thee, thy said Image, increase in it Wisdom and Justice, hide it in thy secret tabernacle, that it be not defiled with the slime of carnal concupiscence, with the smoke of worldly honour, or the dust of earthly thoughts.

Thus far of the form.

CHAPTER V

THE BEATIFIC VISION OF GOD IS THE INTRINSICAL END OF MAN

THERE remaineth, then, the last cause, which is the end. The end wherefore man was created is no other but God himself. But because the end is twofold, the one intrinsical, the other external, let us briefly consider each of them apart.

The intrinsical end of everything is the perfect estate to which it can come. The

* 2 Cor. v 7.

intrinsical end of a palace is the perfect finishing thereof; for then it is said to be ended, when nothing proper to the building is wanting. The intrinsical end of a tree is the most perfect state which the nature thereof doth require; for then a tree may be said to have attained its end, when it spreadeth the boughs, bringeth forth leaves, is beautified with blossoms, and soon after is loaded with ripe fruit. Man, therefore, who is created to a most high end, may thus also be said to have attained his end; whenas his mind shall see God as he is, and in him know all things, his will shall enjoy the chief happiness most ardently loved, and his body being qualified with the glorious gifts of immortality, impassibility and the like, shall obtain perpetual rest and joy. And because the sight of God is the essence of this final happiness, by which we who are the images of God must obtain a most perfect estate by the resemblance of our divine example, therefore St John writeth: *We are now the sons of God; and it hath not yet appeared what we shall be. We know that when he shall appear, we shall be like to him, because we shall see him as he is.**

O my soul, if thou couldst conceive what this meaneth, *we shall be like to him, because we shall see him as he is*; how soon would

* 1 John iii 2.

all the clouds of earthly thoughts be dispersed ! God is most happy, and therefore most happy, because he doth always behold himself as he is, and doth enjoy himself most clearly seen and most ardently loved from all eternity. Of this inestimable good, he would have thee also partake with the angels; to this most high and happy end he created thee. Which that saying signifieth: *Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.** That is, be partaker of the joy which God himself doth enjoy. And again: *I dispose to you, as my Father hath disposed to me, a kingdom ; that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom ;*† that is, I make you partakers of my kingdom and kingly table, that you may enjoy that honour, power and pleasure, which I and God my Father enjoy. And who is able to conceive what is the honour, power, pleasure and happiness of God? Truly, if any would but in thought and hope ascend unto the highness of our end, he would be ashamed to contend for the possession of this earth, to grieve for any temporal loss, or to joy for any temporal gain. He would, I say, be ashamed to partake in the pleasures of beasts, who is made a companion of Angels, and a partaker of God's friendship and of his inestimable delights: for all things among friends are common.

* Matt. xxv 21.

† Luke xxii 29, 30.

CHAPTER VI

THE GLORY OF GOD AND HIS OWN ETERNAL
SALVATION IS THE EXTRINSIC END OF MAN

BUT now the external end of everything is that for which it is made. The end of a palace is the dweller therein; the end of a tree is the possessor thereof; the end of man is only his Lord God, for of himself and for himself he made man, and he keepeth, feedeth, and payeth him his wages. Therefore justly doth he command and say: *Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and shalt serve him only.** But mark diligently, O my soul, the things which are made for man are profitable to man, and not to themselves; beasts labour for man and not for themselves, the fields, vineyards and orchards fill the granaries, cellars and purses of men; neither do servants labour, sweat and toil for themselves, but for the profit, ease and pleasure of their masters. But thy Lord God, who wanteth nothing, would have man truly serve him, and yet the profit and reward of his service he will not have.

For thou, O Lord, art sweet and mild; and plenteous in mercy,† who would not serve thee with all his heart if once he began to taste a little the sweetness of thy government?

* Deut. vi 13.

† Ps. lxxxv 5.

What, O Lord, dost thou command thy servants? *Take, thou sayest, my yoke upon you. And what is thy yoke? My yoke, saith he, is sweet and my burden light.** Who would not willingly carry a yoke that doth not punish but comfort, and a burden that doth not weary but refresh? Not without cause, therefore, doth he add: *and you shall find rest to your souls.** And what is thy yoke which wearieth not, but bringeth rest?

Truly that first and greatest commandment: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart.†* And what is more easy, pleasant and delightful than to love goodness, beauty and excellency itself, which thou art, O my Lord God? Thy servant David judged right who esteemed thy commandments, *More to be desired than gold and many precious stones, and sweeter than honey and the honeycomb.* And he added: *and in keeping them there is a great reward.‡* What meaneth this, O Lord? Dost thou promise reward to those that keep thy commandments, *more to be desired than gold and sweeter than the honeycomb?* Yes, truly thou dost promise a most ample reward, as James thy Apostle saith: *God hath promised the crown of life to them that love him.§* And what is a crown of life? Truly a greater

* Matt. xi 29, 30.

† Matt. xxii 37.

‡ Ps. xviii 11, 12.

§ Jas. i 12.

ASCENT OF THE MIND TO GOD

happiness than we are able to conceive. For so speaketh St Paul out of Isaiah: *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard ; neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love him.** Surely, therefore, there is great reward for keeping thy commandments. Neither is that first and greatest commandment profitable only to man obeying, and not to God commanding, but also the rest of God's commandments do perfect, beautify, instruct, and illuminate the obedient, and finally make them good and happy. Therefore, if thou be wise, understand that thou art created to God's glory and thy eternal happiness; that is thy end, that is thy treasure and centre. If thou come to that end, thou shalt be happy; if thou decline from it, thou shalt be unhappy. Therefore think that assuredly good for thee which directeth thee to that end, and assuredly evil that which causeth thee to decline from it. Prosperity and adversity, wealth and poverty, health and sickness, honour and ignominy, life and death, of a wise man are neither to be desired nor avoided; but if they make to God's glory and thy eternal welfare, they are good and to be desired; if they hinder it, they are evil and to be avoided.

* 1 Cor. ii 9. Cf. Isa. xlv 4.



THE SECOND STEP
*FROM THE CONSIDERATION OF
THE GREATER WORLD*

CHAPTER I

THE GREATNESS OF THE WORLD AND
THE GREATNESS OF GOD

WE have framed the first step of our ladder of ascension unto God, from the consideration of man, who is called the lesser world. Now we also purpose to frame the second step from the consideration of this most great corporal quantity, commonly called the greater world. St Gregory Nazianzen writeth in his second sermon of the Pasch that God placed man as a great world in a lesser world; which is true if we separate angels from the world. For man is greater than the whole corporal world, not in quantity, but in quality; but if it be that angels are comprehended in the world, as we in this place comprehend them, then is man a lesser world placed in a greater world. In this greater world, therefore, which containeth all things, many things are to be wondered at; but especially quantity,

multitude, variety, efficacy and beauty. All which, if by God's assistance they be duly considered, are of great force to elevate the mind and to make it become in a manner wrapt with admiration of an infinite greatness, multitude, variety, efficacy and beauty; and, being returned to itself, whatsoever it beholdeth without God, to despise as vain and of no moment.

Truly the earth is so great, that Ecclesiasticus saith: *Who hath measured the breadth of the earth and the depth of the abyss?** And this may be understood that in so many thousand years as have passed since the creation, as yet the whole surface of the earth (for that Ecclesiasticus called the breadth of the earth) is not known unto us even, who daily have sought after it. And what, I pray you, is the greatness of the earth compared to the compass of the highest heaven? Not without cause it is said by astronomers to be as a point. For we see the sun beams, so to illuminate the opposite stars of the firmament, although the earth be between, as if the same were nothing at all. And if every star in the firmament be greater than the whole earth (as the common opinion of wise men is), and yet seem to us, because of their almost infinite distance, to be very small, who,

* Eccli. i 2.

then, can conceive the greatness of heaven, in which so many million stars do shine? If, therefore, Ecclesiasticus said: *Who hath measured the breadth of the earth and the depth of the abyss?** what would he have said of the compass of the highest heaven, and distance thereof unto the lowest hell? Truly it is so great that it cannot be conceived. Go to now, my soul, I ask thee, if the world be so great, how great is he that made the world? *Great is the Lord, and of his greatness there is no end.*† Hear Isaiah: *Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and weighed the heavens with his palm? Who hath poised with three fingers the bulk of the earth?*‡ Where St Jerome saith that, according to the translation of Aquila, by *pugillum* is understood *little finger*,§ so that the sense is: The whole element of water, which is less than the earth, is measured with one little finger of God; the earth with three fingers, the heaven (which is greater than the earth and water together) is pondered (weighed) with a span. But this is spoken metaphorically, for God is a spirit, and hath no hands nor fingers properly; and the Scripture by these comparisons doth sufficiently show, that

* Eccli. i 2. † Ps. cxliv 3. ‡ Isa. xl 12.

§ St Jer., *Comment in Isa.*, XL, c. 40, No. 487: *Quis mensus est pugillo aquas*, etc.

God is much greater than his creatures, the which Solomon signified more expressly when he said: *Heaven and the Heaven of Heavens do not contain thee.** For if another world, or more worlds, yea infinite worlds were made, God would fill them all. But think not, my soul, thy God doth so fill the world, that a part of God is in a part of the world, and all God in all the world; for God hath no parts, but is all in all the world, and all in every part of the world. Therefore if thou be faithful to him, although armies rise up against thee, thy heart shall not fear, for what should he fear that hath an almighty Father and friend, who seeth all things, and loveth thee with an all-devouring love? But if for thy sins thou hast God an angry judge and an almighty enemy, who seeth all things, and with implacable hatred abominateth all sins; then hast thou just cause to dread with horrible fear, and to give thine eyes and feet no rest, until, God being pleased with thy repentance, thou take breath in the light of his mercies.

* 2 Paralip. vi 18.

CHAPTER II

THE MULTITUDE OF THINGS CREATED AND
THE INFINITY OF THE PERFECTION OF THE
CREATOR

BUT who now can number the multitude of things created by one God, maker of heaven and earth? *Who*—saith Ecclesiasticus—*hath numbered the sand of the sea and the drops of rain?** But how many metals of gold and silver, brass, lead, precious stones, gems, and margarites are there within the earth and sea? How many kinds, sorts, and individuals of herbs, fruits, and plants are there upon the earth? Also, how many kinds, sorts, and individuals of perfect and imperfect living creatures, four-footed beasts, creeping creatures, and fowls? How many kinds, sorts, and individuals of fishes in the sea? Who can number them? What of the multitude of mankind, of whom it is written: *according to thy highness thou hast multiplied the children of men.*† How many stars also are there in heaven, and angels above heaven? For of the stars we read in most true Scripture: *Number the stars if thou canst.*‡ And in another place they are compared to the sands of the sea, which

* Eccli. i 2.

† Ps. xi 9.

‡ Gen. xv 5.

are innumerable.* Of the angels, Daniel writeth: *thousands of thousands ministered to him, and ten thousand times a hundred thousand stood before him.*† And St Thomas affirmeth with St Dionysius that the multitude of angels exceedeth in number all material things.‡ Therefore this almost infinite multitude of things made by one God doth demonstrate that in the divine essence there are infinite perfections. For God would be known to man in some sort by his creatures, and because no creature can truly represent the infinite perfection of the Creator, he hath multiplied the creatures and hath given to every one some goodness and perfection, that thereby may be gathered the goodness and perfection of the Creator, who in our most simple essence includeth infinite perfections, even after a sort as one piece of gold containeth the value of many pieces of brass.

Therefore, my soul, whatever thou dost see or conceive which seemeth to thee admirable, let it be a ladder to ascend to the knowledge of thy Creator, who without doubt is greater and more admirable. So shall it come to pass that creatures which *are turned to a snare to the feet of the unwise,*§ as wisdom

* Jer. xxxiii 22.

† Dan. vii 10.

‡ St Thom. Aq., *Summ.*, I, q. 1, art. 3. Dion. Areop., *Hierarch. coelest*, c. 4.

§ Wisd. xiv 11.

teacheth, shall instruct, not deceive, and direct, not misguide thee from the way of virtue. And if thou possess gold, silver, and precious stones, say in thy heart, my God is more precious who hath promised me himself, if I contemn these things. If thou admire earthly empires and kingdoms, say in thy heart: how much more excellent is the kingdom of heaven which remaineth for ever, which God, who lieth not, hath promised to those that love him. If pleasures and delights begin to tickle thy carnal senses, say in thy heart: the pleasure of the spirit is more delightful than of the flesh, and the delights of the mind surpass those of the belly, for the mortal creature proffereth the one, and the immortal Creator the other, which whoever tasteth may say with the Apostle: *I am filled with comfort: I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulation.** Lastly, if any beautiful, great, or wonderful thing be offered thee beside thy Lord God, answer assuredly: what goodness soever is therein, the same without doubt is much more and better in thy Lord; and, therefore, it is not profitable for thee to change gold for brass, precious stones for glass, great things for small, certain for doubtful, and temporal for eternal.

* 2 Cor. vii 4.

CHAPTER III

THE VARIETY OF CREATED THINGS, AND GOD AS
THE INFINITE SOURCE OF ALL GOOD

BUT although the multitude of creatures is admirable, and declareth the manifold perfections of our God, yet more admirable is the variety of things which is seen in that multiplication. For it is not hard, with one seal to express many figures alike, or with the same mould to print innumerable letters; but to distinguish the former's almost infinite ways, as God did in the creation, is plainly a divine work, most worthy of admiration. To omit those things which are most different and unlike; in the individuals of herbs, plants, flowers and fruits, what great variety there is! Their figures, colours, odours, tastes, how wonderfully distinguished! And is not the like also in living creatures that have sense? But what shall I say of men, since in a great army there can hardly be found two men alike. Which also is verified in the stars and the angels: *For one star differeth from another in brightness,** as the Apostle witnesseth in the first to the Corinthians. And St Thomas saith that the angels, although they exceed corporal things in number, yet they all differ

* 1 Cor. xv 41.

among themselves, not only in individual number, but also in specifical form.*

Lift up then, my soul, thine eyes to God, in whom are the causes of all things; and from whom, as from a fountain of infinite plenty, this almost infinite variety did flow.

For God could not have imprinted those innumerable forms in creatures, without comprehending the causes of them in the bosom of his essence after a most high and eminent manner. Not without cause, therefore, doth the Apostle cry out: *O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God.*† For truly, it is a well of infinite depth, wherein the treasures of that wisdom and knowledge do lie hid, which could produce such variety of things. Rightly, also, did St Francis say unto God: *Deus meus et omnia! O my God and all things!* Because what goodness soever is divided and distributed among creatures, is united in God after a more high and eminent manner.

But thou, my soul, wilt say: though these things seem to be true, yet creatures we see, we touch, we taste, and really enjoy: but God we cannot see, touch, taste, enjoy, nor scarce conceive, but as a thing very far from us; therefore it is no marvel, though

* Thom. Aquin., *loc cit.*, art. 4.

† Rom. xi 33.

we love creatures more than God. But if thou be strong in faith, my soul, and dost continue in hope and charity, thou canst not deny but that after this life, which vanisheth like a shadow, thou shalt see God as he is in himself, and enjoy him much more inwardly, than now thou dost his creatures. Hear our Redeemer: *Blessed are the clean of heart, because they shall see God.** Hear St Paul: *We see now by a glass in a dark sort, but then face to face.*† Hear St John: *We shall be like unto him, because we shall see him as he is.*‡ Moreover, how much of the world belongeth unto thee? Truly, neither the whole nor the half, nor a third or fourth part, nor scarce a small portion thereof falleth to thy share, the which in short time thou must be constrained to forsake. But God, in whom all things are, thou shalt enjoy for all eternity; for *God shall be all in all*,§ in the saints, and blessed without end. He shall be thy life, meat, clothing, house, honour, wealth, pleasure, and thy *All*. Moreover, thy sweet and merciful God doth not command thee, while thou art a pilgrim on earth, to want altogether the solace of his creatures; for he made them all to serve thee. But he commandeth thee to use them soberly and temperately, and give joyfully

* Matt. v 8.

‡ 1 John iii 2.

† 1 Cor. xiii 12.

§ 1 Cor. xv 28.

of thy store unto the needy, having dominion over thy wealth in using it to the glory of God. Weigh, therefore, most diligently, if it be not more expedient for thee to want the creatures in this life even as they are necessary, and in the other, to enjoy thy Creator eternally, in whom (as I have said) all things are; or earnestly to labour in this life to purchase temporal goods, and never to be satisfied with their plenty, and in the other also, to be deprived both of temporal and eternal. Add, moreover, that God is never far from those that love him, for even in this life he giveth them greater delights than the lovers of the world find in creatures. It is not falsely written: *I have been mindful of God and am delighted.** And: *be thou delighted in our Lord, and he will give thee the petitions of thy heart.*† And: *I truly will be delighted in our Lord.*‡ And: *Rejoice the soul of thy servant, because to thee, O Lord, have I lifted up my soul.*§ And to omit the rest, where the Apostle said: *I am replenished with consolation, I do exceedingly abound in joy in all our tribulation;*|| truly he meant not that consolation came from tribulation, or joy from sorrow; for *thorns do not bring forth grapes, nor brambles figs;*¶ but that to mitigate tribulations, God ever sendeth to

* Ps. lxxvi 4.

† Ps. xxxvi 4.

‡ Ps. ciii 34.

§ Ps. lxxx 4.

|| 2 Cor. vii 4.

¶ Matt. vii 16.

his friends such pure, clear, and solid comforts, that temporal joys may not in any sort be compared to them. Therefore, my soul, let this be with thee a sure conclusion: who findeth God, findeth all; who loseth God, loseth all.

CHAPTER IV

THE INHERENT VIRTUE IN CREATED THINGS,
AND THE OMNIPOTENCE OF GOD

It followeth now that from the virtue which God hath given to creatures, we ascend to understanding the infinite virtue of the Creator. There is not anything but hath in it admirable virtue, power, and efficacy. A stone or a lump of earth, if it fall high, with what force doth it descend? What can resist it? What will it not break? When the Holy Ghost in the Apocalypse would describe the excessive violence wherewith the great Babylon—that is, the whole company of the wicked—shall be cast headlong into hell at the day of judgement, thus he saith: *And one strong angel took up as it were a great millstone, and threw it into the sea, saying: With this violence shall Babylon, that great city, be thrown, and shall be found no more.** The water likewise, which is so smooth and soft, and runneth gently upon

* Apoc. xviii 21.

the earth; when it is angry, and swelleth in rivers or brooks, beareth down and destroyeth all things it meeteth with, and not only cottages of husbandmen, but also gates and walls of cities, and bridges of marble have we seen broken down by it. Moreover, the winds which blow so sweetly, beat sometimes great ships against the rocks, and overturn aged oaks. I myself have seen—which had I not seen I should not have believed—a very great heap of earth digged up by a vehement wind, and carried upon a country village, so that a deep ditch was seen from whence the earth was taken, and the whole village to which the earth was carried, was covered and in a manner buried therewith. What shall we say of fire? How quickly doth a small fire become a great flame, consuming woods and houses as it were in a moment!

*Behold, saith St James, how much fire what a great wood it kindleth.** What operation is there in herbs! What virtue in stones, and especially in the loadstone and amber! Furthermore, among beasts, some we see are very strong, as lions, bears, bulls, elephants; others very witty although very small, as ants, spiders, bees, etc., and to omit the power of angels, the virtue of the sun and stars which are far from us.

* Jas. iii 5.

How excellent is the wit of man whereby so many arts have been invented, as that we often doubt whether Nature hath been by them equalized or surpassed.

Lift up now, my soul, thine eyes to God, and think what virtue and power is in him, of whom in most true Scripture it is said: *Who is like to thee among the strong, O Lord?** And: *Who only doth great marvels.*† And: *The blessed and only mighty, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.*‡ For what virtue soever creatures have, they received from God, and shall enjoy it so long as it pleaseth him. For who but God caused that neither the waters of the sea nor teeth of the whale did hurt Jonas in the whale's belly?§ Who but God shut the mouths of the hungry lions that they could not touch Daniel?|| Who but God preserved the three children from hurt in the burning furnace?¶ Who but Christ, true God, said to the furious winds and raging sea: *Peace, be still: and the wind ceased, and there was made a great calm?*** That God, who receiveth not virtue and power from any other, but whose will is a power against which none can resist, hath infinite power always and

* Exod. xv 11.

† 1 Tim. vi 15.

|| Dan. vi 16 *sqq.*

** Mark iv 39.

† Ps. cxxxv 4.

§ Jonas ii 1 *sqq.*

¶ Dan. iii 23 *sqq.*

everywhere, in comparison wherewith all the power of men is nothing. For so speaketh Isaias: *All nations as if they were not, so are they before him; and they are reputed of him as nothing, and a vain thing.**

Are they not fools, therefore, which fear the creatures and not the almighty Creator? And trust in the strength of themselves and their friends, and not in God? *If God be for us, who is against us?†* And if God be against us, who shall be for us?

Wherefore, my soul, if thou be wise, *be humbled under the mighty hand of God.‡* Love him truly, and thou shalt not need to fear what man or devil, or any creature can do unto thee. And if perchance thou hast fallen, and provoked thy God to anger, give thy head no rest until thou be at peace with him, *for it is horrible to fall into the hands of the living God.§*

CHAPTER V

THE CREATED BEAUTY OF THINGS, AND THE UNCREATED BEAUTY OF GOD

IT remaineth that we consider the beauty of creatures, whereof the prophet said: *Thou hast delighted me, O Lord, in thy workmanship.||* And truly as all things

* Isa. xl 17. † Rom. viii 31. ‡ 1 Pet. v 6.

§ Heb. x 31. || Ps. xci 5.

that God made are good, so are they all beautiful, if they be rightly considered. But, omitting the rest, let us speak of those things which in the judgement and opinion of all men are beautiful. Great surely is the beauty of a green meadow, of a well-kept garden, of a pleasant wood, of a calm sea, of a clear air, of fountains, rivers, cities, and of the bright sky garnished with innumerable stars, like gems. How much also doth the beauty of a tree delight us that is adorned with blossoms or loaded with fruit; the shapes likewise of divers kinds of four-footed beasts, the flight of birds, and the sporting of fishes! What shall I say of the beauty of the moon and stars, but especially of that great and bright planet, the sun, which comforteth all the world at his rising? But men to whom we chiefly speak, are delighted with nothing more than with their own beauty and comeliness. *By the beauty of women many have perished*,* saith Ecclesiasticus. We have often seen and grieved that men, otherwise very wise, have been so in love with the beauty of women; and likewise great and honourable women brought to such folly by the beauty of men, as they have preferred their love before their estate and dignity, children and parents, yea, their life and eternal salvation.

* Eccli. ix 9.

The examples which are read in Holy Scripture of David, Solomon, and Samson, are known, and histories are full of the like.

Wherefore, my soul, if so great beauty be given by God to creatures, how great and admirable mayest thou think is the beauty of God himself? For none can give that which he hath not. And if men, delighted with the beauty of the sun and stars, thought those bright bodies, saith the wise man, to be gods, let them know *how much the Lord of them is more beautiful than they, for the author of beauty made all these things.** How great the beauty of God is, we may gather not only because it comprehendeth the beauty of all creatures most eminently within itself, but also for that it being unto us invisible while we are pilgrims on this earth, and only understood by faith of Scriptures and mirror of creatures; notwithstanding many saints have been so inflamed with the love thereof, that some of them have hid themselves in deserts, and attended only to the contemplation thereof, as St Mary Magdalen, St Paul the first hermit, the great St Anthony, and others, of whom you may read in the religious history of Theodoret. Others, forsaking their wives and children, and whatsoever else they possessed on earth, lived in monasteries, under the

* Wisd. xiii 3.

obedience of others, that they might enjoy the friendship of God. Others desired willingly with rigorous pains to end their lives that they might come to the sight of that infinite beauty. Hear one of them, to wit, St Ignatius the Martyr, in his Epistle to the Romans: *Let fire, gallows, beasts, breaking of my bones, quartering of my members, bruising of my body, and all the torments of the devil come upon me, so that I may enjoy Christ.** If, then, this divine beauty not yet seen, but only believed and hoped for, could kindle such a fervent desire, what will it do whenas, the veil being removed, it shall be seen as it is in itself? It will doubtless bring to pass, *that being drunk with the torrent of that pleasure,*† we neither will nor can one moment turn our eyes from it. And what wonder is it, if the angels and blessed souls which always see the face of their Father in heaven, are not wearied or tired with that sight, since God himself from all eternity beholding his own beauty, is fully pleased therewith, and being happy by that sight, desireth nothing else, entering as it were, into a vineyard or garden of all delights, from whence he never shall nor will depart.

Seek that beauty, O my soul, sigh after it day and night; say with the prophet: *My soul hath thirsted after the strong, living God.*

* *Ep. ad Rom.*, No. 5.

† *Ps.* xxxv 9.

*When shall I come and appear before the face of God?** Say with the Apostle: *We are bold, and have a good will to be pilgrims rather from the body, and to be present with our Lord.*† Neither do thou fear to be defiled with the love of that beauty; for the love thereof doth comfort, not corrupt, doth purify and not pollute the heart. The holy virgin and martyr St Agnes said truly: *I love Christ, whose Mother is a virgin, whose Father knoweth no woman, whom when I love I am chaste, when I touch I am clean, when I take I remain a virgin.*‡ But if thou dost truly desire the uncreated beauty of thy Lord, thou must fulfil that which the Apostle addeth in that place: *Therefore, saith he, we endeavour whether absent or present, to please him.* If God please thee, thou oughtest likewise to please God. And surely we shall please God in the country of the living, whenas we shall be illuminated with his glory, as the prophet saith: *I will please our Lord in the country of the living;*§ but in this pilgrimage we are so easily polluted and defiled with the slime of sin, that the Apostle St James said: *In many things we offend all,*|| and the prophet David, to show how few are immaculate in

* Ps. xli 3.

† 2 Cor. v 8.

‡ Prud., *De coron. hymn.* 14; Ambros. "*de virgin.*" I, c. 2.

§ Ps. cxiv 9.

|| Jas. iii 2.

ASCENT OF THE MIND TO GOD

this life, affirmeth that it belongeth to happiness, saying: *Blessed are the immaculate in the way.** Therefore, my soul, if in this absence and pilgrimage thou wilt please thy Lord, it is not enough to desire to please him, but it behoveth thee, as the Apostle saith, to strive to please him; this is with great diligence to beware of such spots as may make thy face deformed; and if any happen to stick therein, with like diligence to endeavour to wipe them away. Dost thou not see how women which seek to please their husbands, spend many hours in dressing their hair, adorning their face, and wiping away the spots of their garments; and all this they do to please the eyes of a mortal man who soon after must be turned to earth and ashes; what oughtest thou, therefore, to do to please the eyes of thy immortal spouse, who always beholdeth thee, and desireth to see thee without spot or wrinkle? It is needful then to strive with all thy force, *that thou walk before him in holiness and justice,*† and remove from thee with speed all things that may hinder the same, not having respect to flesh and blood, nor to the speeches and opinions of men; for thou canst not please God and the world both at once, according to the Apostle's saying: *If I did please men, I should not be the servant of Christ.*‡

* Ps. cxviii 1.

† Luke i 75.

‡ Gal. i 10.



THE THIRD STEP
*FROM THE CONSIDERATION OF THE
EARTH*

CHAPTER I

AS OUR BODY FINDETH REST IN THE EARTH,
SO IN GOD ALONE DOTH OUR MIND FIND
REPOSE

WE have considered the corporal world in general: let us now consider the principal parts thereof, that from them we may erect a ladder to contemplate their maker.

First there is the earth, the which, although it occupy the lowest place among the elements, and seemeth to be less than the rest; yet it is not less than the water, and in dignity and worth it excelleth the other elements. Whereupon we often read in Holy Scripture that God made heaven and earth as the principal parts of the world;* for he made heaven as the palace of God and angels, the earth as the palace of men. *The Heaven of Heavens is to our Lord*, saith the Prophet,

* Gen. i 1, 2; 1 Esdr. ix 6; Judith xiii 24.

*but the earth he hath given to the children of men.** And that is the cause why the heaven is full of bright stars, and the earth aboundeth with metals, precious stones, herbs, trees, and beasts of divers kinds, whereas the water is stored only with fish, and the air and fire are in a manner empty and naked elements. But omitting this, the earth hath three things most worthy of consideration, by which a vigilant mind may easily ascend unto God.

First, the earth is the most firm foundation of the whole world, without which we could neither walk, work, rest, nor live. *He hath established, saith David, the round world which shall not be moved,†* and *Thou hast founded the earth upon the stability thereof, it shall not be inclined for ever and ever.‡*

Secondly, the earth—like a good nurse to men and other living creatures—doth daily bring forth herbs, fruits, grass, and innumerable things of like kind, for so God speaketh: *Behold I have given you all manner of herb that feedeth upon the earth, and all trees that have in themselves seed of their own kind to be your meat, and to all beasts of the earth.§*

Thirdly, the earth bringeth forth stones and wood to build houses, and metals of brass

* Ps cxiii 25.

‡ Ps. ciii 5.

† Ps. xc 2.

§ Gen. i 29, 30.

and iron for divers uses, and gold and silver whereof money is made, which is the instrument whereby all things necessary for the life of man are easily procured.

And truly, that first property of the earth, to wit, to be the place in which our bodies rest, and not in the water, air or fire, is an emblem of our Creator, in whom only man's soul findeth a place of rest. *Thou hast made us, O Lord, saith St Augustine, for thyself, and our heart is unquiet until it rest in thee.** Solomon as much as ever any king sought after rest in honour, wealth, and pleasure. He possessed a most ample and peaceable kingdom, so that the Scripture witnesseth: *He had in his dominion all the kingdoms with him, from the river of the land of the Philistines, unto the border of Egypt: of them that offered him presents, and served him all the days of his life.†* His wealth also was incomparable, so that he kept forty thousand horses for chariots, and twelve thousand to ride upon. And as we read in the same book, the navy of Solomon brought gold and precious stones from Ophir in such plenty that silver was nothing worth; and as great was the plenty thereof in Jerusalem, as stones in the streets. So many also were the pleasures which he had provided for himself, that they may seem incredible. For falling

* *Confess.*, I, c. 1.

† 3 Kings iv 21.

into the inordinate love of women, he took seven hundred wives as queens, and concubines three hundred,* as we read in the same book. But let us hear himself speak of himself. *I have magnified my works, saith he, I have built me houses and planted vineyards, I have made gardens and orchards, and set them with trees of all kinds; and I have made me ponds of waters to water the wood of springing trees: I have possessed men servants and women servants and have had a great family: herds also and great flocks of sheep, above all that were before me in Jerusalem: I have heaped together to myself silver and gold and the substance of kings and provinces. I have made me singing men and singing women and the delights of the children of men: cups and goblets, to serve to pour out wines: and I surpassed in riches all that were before me in Jerusalem. Wisdom also hath persevered with me, and all things that mine eyes desired I have not denied to them; neither have I stayed my heart, but that it enjoyed all pleasure, and delighted itself in these things which I had prepared: and this I esteemed my portion, if I did use my labour.†* Thus he who doubtless had as great contentment as could be had in creatures, for he neither wanted kingdoms, nor wealth, nor pleasures, nor human wisdom so much esteemed; and lastly he enjoyed

* 3 Kings xi 3.

† Eccles. ii 4-10.

peace a long time to possess so great happiness.

Let us see now if all these things could content and satisfy the desires of his mind: *When I had, saith he, turned myself to all the works which my hands had done and to the labours wherein I had sweated in vain, I saw in all things vanity and affliction of mind and nothing to be permanent under the sun.** Solomon, therefore, found not contentment in all his riches, delights, wisdom and honours; neither could he, although he had enjoyed much more, for the soul of man is immortal, and these things are mortal, and cannot long remain under the sun, neither can it be that a soul which is capable of infinite good should be satisfied with finite goods. Therefore as the body of man cannot rest in the air, although it be most spacious, nor in the water, although it be very deep, because the earth is the place thereof and not the air or water, so the mind of man is never satisfied with airy dignities, nor watery wealth, to wit, with soft and deceiving pleasures, nor with the false glory of human knowledge, but with God only, who is the centre of souls and their only true resting-place.

O how truly and wisely did the father of Solomon say: *What is to me in heaven, and*

* Eccles. ii 11.

*besides thee what would I upon earth? God of my heart and God my portion for ever.** As if he should have said: I find nothing in heaven or earth or in any creature therein that can give me true contentment, thou only art the God of my heart, that is, thou only art a firm rock to my heart; for the word "God" in the Hebrew text signifieth a rock in that place. Thou, therefore, art only a most firm rock to my heart, in thee only will I rest; thou only art my portion, my inheritance, and all my good; other things are nothing, nor of any force to suffice me one day, but thou alone wilt suffice me for ever.

Dost thou not know as yet, my soul, that God only is the rock whereon thou must rest; and that in all things else is vanity and affliction of spirit? For they are not, but appear to be, they comfort not, but afflict, because they are gotten with labour, kept with care, and lost with sorrow. Despise, therefore, if thou be wise, all transitory things, lest they carry thee away with them; and abide in that unity and bond of charity which continueth for ever. Lift up thy heart to God in heaven, lest it putrefy on earth; and learn true wisdom from the folly of many, in whose names the wise man speaketh, saying: *We, therefore, have erred from the way of the truth, and the light of*

* Ps. lxxiii 25, 26.

*justice hath not shined to us and the sun of understanding rose not to us. We are wearied in the way of iniquity and perdition, and have walked hard ways, but the way of our Lord we have not known. What hath pride profited us? Or what commodity hath the vaunting of riches brought us? All those things are passed away as a shadow: but in our naughtiness we are confirmed.**

CHAPTER II

WE HAVE OUR SURE FOUNDATION ON GOD

MOREOVER, a rock is also in another respect an emblem of our Lord God, as the wisdom of God did expound unto us in his Gospel when he said: that a house built upon a rock should remain immovable, although the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew: but a house built upon the sand cannot stand against any of these things, but at the first storm of rain, wind, or floods it is cast down and the fall thereof is great.†

Thy house, my soul, hath divers powers and faculties, as it were chambers or parlours; and if it be built upon God as upon a rock—that is, if thou dost firmly believe in God, if all thy trust be in God, and thou be grounded in the love of God—that thou mayest say with the Apostle: *Who shall*

* Wisd. v 6-9, 13.

† Matt. vii 24-27.

*separate us from the charity of Christ ?** Then be assured that neither the spiritual wickedness which is above thee, nor carnal concupiscence which is under thee, nor thy domestical enemies which are on the side of thee, to wit, thy kinsfolks and acquaintances, shall ever by their temptations prevail against thee. Great surely is the force and subtlety of spiritual powers, but greater is the power and wisdom of the Holy Ghost, who ruleth in that house which is founded on God. The flesh also fighteth eagerly against the spirit and sometimes overcometh the strongest; but the love of God doth overcome the love of the flesh, and the fear of God doth vanquish the fear of the world. Those also of a man's household are his enemies,† and with their perverse counsels draw his soul into the company of sinners. But that soul which trusteth, she hath a Lord, a Father, a brother, and spouse in heaven; will easily condemn and in that respect hate her carnal friends and kinsfolks, and say with the Apostle: *I am sure that neither death nor life, nor other creatures, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*‡ But that soul is indeed miserable, whose house being built upon the sand, cannot continue long: and the fall

* Eph. iii 19 ; Rom. viii 35.

† Mich. vii 6.

‡ Rom. viii 38, 39.

thereof will be great, because it believeth lies and trusteth to a staff of reed; whose God is the belly, or money, or the smoke of honour; all which things pass away and perish very speedily and draw the soul which followeth them into eternal destruction.

CHAPTER III

THE EARTH DOTH NOURISH THE BODY BY
VIRTUE OF GOD, WHO ALONE NOURISHETH
ALL MANKIND

IT is also another property of the earth, like a good nurse, plentifully to bring forth herbs and fruit for the sustenance of men and beasts. This property directeth us to our maker, as to our true nursing Father, for not the earth, but God in the earth, bringeth forth all good things. So speaketh the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David: *Who bringeth forth grass for beasts and herb for the service of men.** And again: *All expect of thee that thou give them meat in season. Thou giving to them, they shall gather it; thou opening thy hand, all things shall be filled with bounty.*† And our Lord in the Gospel: *Behold the fowls of the air that they sow not, neither reap, nor gather into barns, and your heavenly Father feedeth them.*‡

* Ps. cxlvi 8.

† Ps. ciii 27, 28.

‡ Matt. vi 26.

And the Apostle: *And truly not without testimony hath God left himself, bestowing benefits from heaven, giving rain and fruitful seasons, filling with food and joy our hearts.** Neither is that false which is said in the beginning of Genesis: *Let the earth shoot forth green herbs and such as may seed, and fruit tree yielding fruits after its kind.†* For although the earth shoot forth herbs and fruit trees, yet it is by the virtue which God gave unto it, and God by it keepeth and increaseth them. Therefore David, inviting all creatures to praise their maker, joineth with the rest: *Fruitful trees and all cedars;‡* and the three children in Daniel are exhorted with all other things to bless, praise, and magnify him for ever.§

And if all creatures after their manner praise God, with what affection oughtest thou, my soul, to praise him for all his benefits which thou dost daily enjoy, acknowledging in them his fatherly love which never ceaseth to provide all things for thee. But this is not much in the eyes of thy Lord God: for he produceth in thee, as in his spiritual field, the noble branch of charity. For charity is not of the world, but of God,|| as the most beloved disciple speaketh in his Epistle. From charity also, as from a heavenly tree,

* Acts xiv 16. † Gen. i 11. ‡ Ps. cxlviii 9.

§ Dan. iii 88.

|| I John iv 7.

spring the white and odoriferous flowers of holy cogitations, the green leaves of profitable words for the salvation of nations, and the ripe fruits of good works by which God is glorified, our neighbour edified, and merits increased and kept for eternal life.

But woe to those who, after the manner of foolish beasts, desire to be filled with the fruits of the earth, not thinking of their giver, nor thanking him for them: their souls are like the earth which God did curse, that bringeth forth nothing but thorns and thistles. For what do they think, in whose minds God soweth not chaste intentions, but of adulteries, homicide, sacrilege, thefts, treacheries, and the like? And what do they speak but blasphemies, perjuries, reproaches, heresies, detractions, contumelies, false testimonies, and lies, which they have learned from their father the devil? Finally, what fruits do they bring forth, but those whereof we have spoken, and which the Apostle calleth, *the works of the flesh*.^{*} These, indeed, are the thorns which first prick the mind, which bringeth them forth, with bitter thoughts of fears and cares: and then they prick the fame, minds, and bodies of others with uncurable wounds, whereby great hurt oftentimes ensueth.

But leaving this, my soul, if thou wilt be

^{*} Gal. v 19.

the garden of God, take heed that thorns and thistles be never found in thee; but with all diligence cherish the tree of charity, the lily of chastity, and the spikenard of humility. Take heed it never enter into thy mind to think that these branches of heavenly virtues come from thyself, and not from thy Lord God, who is the Lord of virtues; neither attribute to thyself the keeping, increase, and ripeness of the fruit of good works, but as much as thou canst, commend them unto God.

CHAPTER IV

THE TREASURES OF THE EARTH ARE, AS IT WERE,
A SHADOWING OF THE ETERNAL GOOD
THINGS OF GOD

THERE remaineth the last commendation of the earth, for that in her bosom are contained gold, silver, and precious stones. But truly, the earth doth not by her own virtue bring forth such precious kinds of things, but he who by Aggeus saith: *Mine is the silver and mine is the gold.** O lover of men, did it please thy goodness, not only to produce stones, wood, iron, brass, lead, and such-like things necessary for the building of houses, ships, and other instruments; but also gold, silver, and precious stones for

* Agg. ii 9.

beauty and ornament? And if thou givest these things to pilgrims on earth, and often also to thy enemies which blaspheme thy name, what wilt thou give to thy friends who shall praise thee and reign with thee in heaven? Thou wilt give them, doubtless, not some little pieces of gold and silver, or some few precious stones, but that city whereof John the Apostle speaketh in the Apocalypse when he saith: *And the building of the wall thereof was of jasper stone: but the city itself pure gold, like to pure glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all precious stones: and the twelve gates there are twelve pearls.**

But we must not imagine that heavenly city of Jerusalem is built or adorned with gold, pearls, and precious stones, as here they are: for the Holy Ghost useth these words, because he speaketh to us who see no better or greater things. But without doubt that city, which is the country of God's elect, doth more excel all the cities of the world, than a city of gold or precious stones doth surpass all country villages made of straw and clay.

Lift up, therefore, my soul, the eyes of thy mind to heaven, and think of what value the riches are there, since gold, silver, and precious stones, which are here so esteemed,

* Apoc. xxi 18, 19, 21.

in comparison therewith are but as straw and clay. The gold, silver, and precious stones also which we have, are corruptible, but those which shine in that heavenly city are incorruptible. But if thou wilt send thy corruptible gold and silver by the hands of the poor unto that heavenly city—which surely if thou be wise thou wilt do—then will it become incorruptible and be thine for ever.

For the truth cannot lie who saith: *Sell the things that thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.** And in another place: *Sell the things that you possess and give alms. Make to you purses that wear not, treasure that wasteth not in heaven, whither the thief approacheth not, neither doth the moth corrupt.†* O incredulity of the sons of men! Man, who is a liar, promiseth ten for one hundred, and to repay the principal to his creditor, and he is believed: God, who cannot lie, promiseth to him that giveth an alms, a treasure in heaven, an hundred for one, yea, eternal life; and yet the covetous man feareth and cannot easily be persuaded to believe, but had rather hide his treasure, where rust consumeth it and thieves break in and steal it, than lay it up in heaven, where there is neither rust to consume it nor thief to steal it.‡

* Matt. xix 21.

† Luke xii 33.

‡ Matt. xix 21.

But, O unhappy man, although it chance that neither thieves do steal nor moth nor rust corrupt that which thou hast gotten with labour and kept with care; yet shall it not be thine as it might have been, if by the hands of the poor thou hadst sent it into the heavenly treasury: for experience teacheth, that the wealth which covetous rich men have gathered, cometh unto prodigal heirs, who in much shorter time waste it, than their covetous parents got it, whose sin of covetousness remaineth notwithstanding for ever: *for their worm of conscience shall not die, and the fire of hell shall not be extinguished.**

Therefore, my soul, let the folly of others teach thee wisdom. Hear thy Lord and Master preaching: *See and beware of all avarice: for not in any man's abundance doth his life consist of those things which he possesseth.*† The covetous man gathereth and keepeth to have whereby he may maintain his life a long time, but it happeneth otherwise: for he dieth whenas he least thinketh thereof, but his wealth covetously gotten doth engender a worm that will not die, and kindleth a fire that will not be quenched. O unhappy, covetous man, why hast thou so carefully scraped together money to prepare fuel for hell fire? Hear St James

Mark ix 47; Isa. lxvi 24.

† Luke xii 15.

ASCENT OF THE MIND TO GOD

in his last Epistle: *Go to now, ye rich men, weep howling in your miseries which shall come to you. Your riches are corrupt: and your garments are eaten of moths, your gold and silver is rusted; and their rust shall be for a testimony to you and shall eat your flesh as fire.** You, saith St James, because you are rich, are called and accounted happy; but indeed ye are more miserable than the poor. And ye have great cause to lament, for the great miseries which assuredly shall fall upon you. The superfluous wealth you have kept and suffered to corrupt, when ye ought to have given it to the poor; the superfluous garments you have possessed, and rather would have the moths to eat them than the poor to be clothed with them; and your gold and silver which you would have to rust rather than bestow it to feed them: all these things, I say, will bear witness against you at the day of judgement, and the moths and rust of your wealth will become a burning fire, which shall waste your flesh for ever and not consume it, that the fire may not be quenched nor the pain ended. Let us, therefore, conclude with the kindly prophet: *They have said—to wit, the fools—that it is a happy people which hath these things, that is to say great wealth; but, indeed: Blessed is the people whose God is our Lord.*†

* Jas. v 1-3.

† Ps. cxliii 15.



THE FOURTH STEP
*FROM THE CONSIDERATION OF
WATERS AND ESPECIALLY
OF FOUNTAINS*

CHAPTER I

WATER WASHETH THE BODILY STAINS ; GOD
WASHETH THE STAINS OF THE SOUL

THE water hath the second place among the elements of the world, and from it also being rightly considered, a step of ascension unto God may be framed. First, therefore, we will consider waters in general, and after we will draw a special ascension unto God from fountains.

The water is cold and moist, and hath, as it were, five properties: for it washeth away spots, it quencheth fire, it cooleth heat, it joineth divers things together, and lastly it ascendeth as high as it descendeth low. These things are manifest emblems and resemblances of God the Creator of all.

Water doth wash corporal spots: God doth wash spiritual spots. *Thou shalt wash me, saith David, and I shall be made whiter*

*than snow.** For although contrition, sacraments, priests, alms, and other works of piety do wash the spots, that is, the sins of the soul, yet they are but instruments or dispositions; the Author of this washing is only God. *I am*, saith God by Isaias, *I am he that take clean away thine iniquities for mine own sake.†* And, therefore, the Pharisees, who murmuring against Christ said: *Who can forgive sins but only God?‡* were not deceived in giving only to God supreme power to forgive sins, but because they believed not that Christ was God, and so they did both blaspheme and speak the truth at the same time.

Neither doth God only wash the spots of the soul like water. For so writeth St John: *He that believeth in me, as the scripture saith, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water, and this he said of the spirit which they should receive which believe in him: for as yet the spirit was not given; because Jesus was not yet glorified.§* Therefore God the Holy Ghost is living water, and thereof speaketh Ezechiel: *I will pour out upon you clean water, and you shall be cleansed from all contaminations.||* But because this increated water doth far excel the created water,

* Ps. l 9.

‡ Luke v 21.

|| Ezech. xxxvi 25.

† Isa. xliii 25.

§ John vii 38, 39.

we will set down three differences between the washing of the one and the other.

The created water doth wash away corporal spots, yet not all, for many it cannot wash away unless it be holpen with soap or some other means. The increated water doth wash away all spots, for so we read in the place above cited: *And you shall be cleansed from all your contaminations.*

The created water doth seldom so wash away spots but that some little sign of them remaineth. The increated water doth wash in such sort, that the thing washed becometh more white and clean than before it was contaminated: *Thou shalt wash me*, saith David, *and I shall be made whiter than snow.** And our Lord saith by Isaias: *If your sins shall be as scarlet, they shall be made white as snow: and if they be red as vermillion, they shall be white as wool.†*

Also the created water doth wash natural spots, which resist not the washing: the increated water doth wash voluntary spots, which cannot be cleansed unless the soul consent thereunto. And so admirable is the virtue of this water, that it sweetly entereth into hardened hearts, and is not refused, because, as St Augustine doth truly teach, *Itself is the cause that it is not refused.‡* Who

* Ps. 19.

† Isa. i 18.

‡ *De predest. SS.*, c. 8, No. 13.

can conceive, O Lord, how thou givest faith unto the unfaithful, humility unto the proud, and charity unto thine enemies, that he who once breathed forth threats and slaughter, and persecuted thee in thy disciples, being changed on the sudden, most willingly suffered for thee and thy Church threats and persecutions? * Far be it from me to dive into thy secrets, for I had rather feel than search after the force of thy grace. And because I know that water of thine to be a *voluntary rain, separated to thine inheritance*, † as the prophet said; therefore, I humbly beseech thee, let me be found in thy inheritance, and let the dew of thy grace descend into the earth of my heart, that it remain not like earth without water to thee, for so barren it is that of itself it can think no good. But to proceed.

CHAPTER II

WATER QUENCHETH FIRE; GOD QUENCHETH THE FLAMES OF LUST

WATER quencheth fire; and the heavenly water, that is, the grace of the Holy Ghost, doth strangely quench the fire of carnal lust.

Fasting and bodily afflictions avail much also if they be used as instruments of grace, otherwise of themselves they are of small

* Acts ix 1 *sqq.*

† Ps. lxvii 10.

force. For love is the chief among the affections and perturbations of the mind, which ruleth all and is obeyed by all. Love will not be forced, and if it be stopped one way, it breaketh out another way. Love feareth nothing, dareth anything, and vanquisheth all things. Lastly, love yieldeth only unto greater love. So fleshly love which followeth the wealth and pleasures of the world, yieldeth only to the love of God, and the water of the Holy Ghost distilling into the heart of man quickly cooleth the heat of concupiscence. Witness St Augustine, who being long accustomed to lust, thought it impossible to lack the company of a woman; yet beginning to taste the grace of the Holy Ghost, he cried out in the ninth book of his Confessions: *Oh, how sweet was it to me on the sudden to be without the pleasures of trifles, and what before I feared to lose, I now rejoiced to forsake. For thou, the true and chiefest happiness, didst cast them from me: thou didst cast them from me, and didst enter in their stead more sweet than any pleasure, but not to flesh and blood; more bright than any light, more inward than any secret; more high than any honour, but not to those that are high in themselves.**

* Confess., IX, c. 1.

CHAPTER III

WATER QUENCHETH THIRST; GOD QUENCHETH
THE DESIRES OF THE HEART

WATER also quencheth thirst; and only the water of the Holy Ghost can quench the manifold and almost endless desires of man's heart. So the Truth speaking to the Samaritan woman plainly taught: *Every one*, saith he, *that drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but he that shall drink of the water that I will give him, shall not thirst for ever.** Indeed so it is: *the eye is not filled with seeing, neither is the ear fulfilled with hearing.†* For the mind of man is capable of infinite good, and all creatures are finite. But he that beginneth once to drink of this divine water, wherein all things are, seeketh after no more. And of this we have spoken before, where we treated that the rest of our souls is in God only, as in their proper centre.

CHAPTER IV

WATER JOINETH TOGETHER CORPOREAL THINGS;
GOD ACHIEVETH THE UNION OF SPIRITUAL
THINGS

WATER joineth divers things together, as many grains of corn to make one loaf, and many pieces of earth to make one brick.

* John iv 13.

† Eccles. i 8.

But more easily and more inseparably doth the water of the Holy Ghost make many men to be of one heart and one soul, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles of the first Christians, upon whom the Holy Ghost did next after the Apostles descend.* And our Lord being about to ascend to his Father, commendeth that unity which the water of the Holy Ghost causeth, saying: *And not for them only do I pray, but for them also that by their word shall believe in me: that they all may be one, as thou, Father, in me and I in thee, that they also in us may be one.* And a little after: *That they may be one as we also are one. I in them and thou in me, that they may be consummate in one.*† To which unity the Apostle also exhorteth us in his Epistle to the Ephesians, saying: *Be careful to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of grace. One body and one spirit: as you are called in one hope of your vocation.*‡ O happy union which maketh many men one body of Christ, governed by one head, participating of one bread, drinking of one cup, and, living by one spirit of God, is made one spirit with him. What can his servants more desire than to participate not only of all their master's goods, but also by the inseparable bond of love to be made one

* Acts iv 32.

† John xvii 20-23.

‡ Eph. iv 3, 4.

with the Almighty? All which is wrought by the grace of the Holy Ghost, when, as living water, it is devoutly received and diligently kept in the heart.

CHAPTER V

WATER DESCENDETH AND AGAIN ASCENDETH;
THE FOUNTAIN OF THE GRACE OF GOD
GUSHETH FORTH UNTO LIFE ETERNAL

LASTLY, the water ascendeth as high, as it descendeth low. And as the Holy Ghost came from heaven to earth, so that heart in whom he is received is made *a fountain of water springing up into life everlasting*,* as our Lord said to the Samaritan woman; that is, man born again of water and the Holy Ghost, who hath the same Spirit dwelling within him, causeth his merits to ascend from whence grace did descend.

Therefore, my soul, being taught and incited by these passages of Scripture, say often to thy heavenly Father with deep sighs: Give me this water which washeth clean all spots, quencheth all fire of lust, cooleth all heat of thirst, and maketh me one spirit with my God, that, being in me a fountain of water springing up into life everlasting, it may cause in me merits to ascend thither,

* John iv 14.

where I hope to live for ever. Not without cause did the Son of God say: *If you then being naught know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the good Spirit to them that ask him?** And he saith not, that he will give bread, clothes, wisdom, charity, or life everlasting: but *the good Spirit*, for in it all things are contained. Cease not then, O my soul, to admonish the Father of the promise of his Son, saying with great devotion and assured hope to obtain:

“O holy Father, not in mine own justification do I pray unto thee, but in the promise of thine only begotten Son. For he hath said unto us: *How much more will your Father in heaven give the good Spirit to them that ask him?* Surely thy Son is the Truth,† he deceiveth us not: fulfil, therefore, the promise of thy Son who hath glorified thee upon earth‡ and was obedient to thee unto death, even the death of the Cross.§ Give the *good Spirit* to them that ask it of thee. Give the spirit of thy love and fear, that thy servant may love nothing but thee, and his neighbour in thee, nor fear but only to offend thee: *Create a clean heart in me, O God: and renew a right spirit in my bowels. Cast me not away from thy face: and thy Holy*

* Luke xi 13.

‡ John xvii 4.

† John xiv 6.

§ Phil. ii 8.

*Spirit take not from me. Render unto me the joy of thy salvation, and confirm me with a principal spirit.**”

CHAPTER VI

A FOUNTAIN OF WATER IS THE IMAGE OF GOD
AS THE FOUNTAIN OF OUR BEING

NOW I come to the resemblance which fountains of water have with God: for from them also may the mind be elevated to consider his wonderful works. And not without cause is God called in Holy Scripture, *a fountain of life and fountain of wisdom, and a fountain of living water.*† And that he is the Fountain of being, we gather by these words of God to Moses: *I am who am: He who is hath sent me to you.*‡ All which the Apostle seemeth to have included when he saith: *In him we live and move and be.*§ For in him we are, as in a fountain of being: in him we live, as in a fountain of life: and in him we move, as in a fountain of wisdom; because *wisdom is more movable than all movable things and reacheth everywhere, because of her cleanness*, as it is said in the book of Wisdom.||

* Ps. l 12-14.

† Ps. xxxv 10; Eccli. i 5; Jer. ii 13.

‡ Exod. iii 14.

§ Acts xvii 28.

|| Wisd. vii 24.

A fountain of water with us hath this property, that rivers spring from it, and when they cease to flow from their fountain they are soon dried up; but the fountain dependeth not of the rivers, for it receiveth not water from them, but from itself, and giveth it unto others. This is a true resemblance of the divinity: for God is the most true Fountain of being; because he receiveth his being from no other thing; but all things received their being from him. God received his being from no other thing, because his essence is to be, and his being is his existence; so that it cannot be conceived nor caused but that God hath been always and always shall be. Other things may be for a time, and for a time not be: because existence doth not necessarily belong unto their essence. For example: it belongeth to the essence of a man to be a reasonable creature: and therefore he cannot be a man unless he be a reasonable creature: and if existence belonged also to the essence of a man, he should then always exist: but because it belongeth not to his essence, therefore he may exist and not exist. God, then, is the Fountain of being, because his essence includeth actual existence for ever, as is signified by those words *I am who am*.^{*} That is, I am essence itself, and receive not

^{*} Exod. iii 14.

my being from any other thing, for to me only my essence is my existence: therefore, eternity and immortality is proper unto God only, as the Apostle saith: *To the King of the worlds immortal, only God.** And *Who only hath immortality.†* For all other things receive in such sort their essence from God: that unless they do always depend on him, and be preserved by him, they presently cease to be. Whereupon the same Apostle saith: *who carrieth all things by the word of his power.‡*

Therefore, O my soul, admire and reverence the infinite goodness of thy Maker, who maintaineth or preserveth all things so lovingly, although he needeth not their service. Admire and imitate also the patience of thy said Maker who is *so merciful upon the unkind and the evil,§* that he feedeth and preserveth those which blaspheme him, and deserve to be brought to nothing. Let it not, therefore, seem much unto thee, to bear sometimes with the infirmities of thy brethren, and, as thou art commanded, to do good to those that hate thee.

But the being a fountain doth not only consist in not receiving being from another fountain, and in giving being unto other things; for the water both of fountains and

* 1 Tim. i 17.

† Heb. i 3.

‡ 1 Tim. vi 16.

§ Luke vi 35.

rivers with us is of the same kind, and albeit that fountains receive not their water from other fountains, yet they have a cause of their being, to wit, vapours, which also have other causes successively, until we come unto God, the first cause. But God thy Maker, my soul, is not of the same kind with creatures, but infinitely surpasseth them in dignity, nobility, and excellency. He also is truly and properly the Fountain of being, not only because he doth not receive his being from another fountain of being, but also for that he hath no cause at all. A fountain of created water, as is said, is not derived from any other water, but from another cause; but the increated Fountain of being hath not anything before himself, dependeth not of anything, wanteth not anything, nor can be hurt by anything; but all things depend of him, and he can *destroy the whole world with a beck*,* as saith the valiant Machabaeus.

Admire this eminency, O my soul, this beginning without beginning, this cause without cause, this essence that is infinite, unlimited, immense and absolutely necessary, in comparison whereof all other things are but casual. And of this, perhaps, the Truth said: *but one thing is necessary*.† Adhere, therefore, to him only, serve him only and

* 2 Mach. viii 18.

† Luke x 42.

delight in his love only. Despise all other things for his sake, or else be not troubled with too much care about many things (since one thing is necessary, which only is enough for thee and all others); but let thy care be never to fall from his grace, studying always and everywhere how to please him.

CHAPTER VII

GOD DWELLING IN HIMSELF IS THE FOUNTAIN
OF LIFE

GOD also is most truly called a Fountain of life, because he *hath life in himself*,* and is life eternal itself: *He is the true God and life eternal*,† saith St John; and all things that live receive life from that fountain, which when it shall cease to give them life, *they shall fail and shall return into their dust*,‡ as the holy prophet David saith. It is proper unto living creatures to beget their like. God also begot a Son most like unto himself: *For as the Father hath life in himself, so he hath given also to the Son to have life in himself*,§ as St John witnesseth in the Gospel; but the Father hath life in himself, because he is the fountain of life, and receiveth life no otherwise: and the Son hath life in himself, because the Father hath given him

* John v 26.

‡ Ps. ciii 29.

† 1 John v 20.

§ John v 26.

the same life which he hath, whereby the Son also is the Fountain of life, yet the fountain of life of the fountain of life, as God of God, and light of light. Who can declare or conceive what the life of God is, and what this Fountain of life is, whence all things that live in heaven or earth draw drops of life? The life which we have known in this banishment is no other but the internal beginning of motion: for those things we say live which move themselves after some manner. And, therefore, the water of rivers is commonly called running or living water, because it seemeth to move of itself, and the water of ponds, standing or dead water, for that it is not moved but by the winds or some other external force.

Thy God, O my soul, most truly liveth and is the Author and Fountain of life. For often in Holy Scripture doth he inculcate this, saying: *Live I, saith our Lord*,* and the prophets often repeat: *The Lord liveth, the Lord liveth*,† and in Jeremias God complaineth of the people, saying: *They have forsaken me, the fountain of living water*.‡ And yet he is not moved either by himself or by any other: *I am God*, saith he, *and am*

* Num. xiv 21, 28; Isa. xlix 18; Ezech. xviii 3, xxxiii 11, xxxiv 8, etc.

† 4 Kings iii 14, v 16; Ps. xvii 47; Jer. iv 2, etc.

‡ Jer. ii 13.

THE ASCENT OF

[St. 4

not changed. And again, God is not as the son of man that he may be changed.† We sing also in the ecclesiastical hymn: Rerum Deus tenax vigor, etc.‡ O God, which doth preserve the strength of things, and (thyself being immovable) dost successively divide the day and night, etc.*

So that if God beget a Son, he begetteth him without mutation; and if he see, hear, speak, love, pardon or judge, he doth all without mutation; and if he create and preserve, or destroy and dissipate, and again renew and change, yet he worketh resting, and changeth without being changed. How, then, doth he live if he move not? And how doth he not live, if he be the Fountain and Author of life? This knot is easily untied. For to live it is absolutely enough that the thing which liveth work of itself, and be not moved by another; but life for the most part in creatures is the internal beginning of motion, because creatures are imperfect, and have need of many things to perform the actions of life; but God is infinite perfection, and hath need of nothing without himself, and, therefore, he worketh of himself and is not moved by any other. Creatures need mutation to engender, and be engendered, because they engender without themselves, and the

* Mal. iii 6.

† Num. xxxiii 19.

‡ *Brev. Rom.*, Hymn at None.

thing engendered must be changed from a not-being to a being; but God begot a Son within himself, and within himself produceth the Holy Ghost; neither ought the Son nor the Holy Ghost to be changed from a not-being to a being, because they receive that being which *was* always, and they receive it not in time but from eternity.

Creatures need the motion of augmentation, because they are born imperfect: but God the Son is born most perfect, and God the Holy Ghost is breathed and produced most perfect. Creatures need the motion of alteration to attain divers qualities which they want: but God wanteth nothing, for his essence is of infinite perfection. Creatures need local motion, because they are not everywhere: but God is wholly everywhere. Moreover, creatures need many things to see, hear, speak, and work, because their life is poor and imperfect: but God needeth nothing without himself to see all, hear all, speak to all, and work all: for he, as is said, is life itself, and the Fountain of life. And that we may put an example in the action of seeing. A man to see, needeth a seeing power, which is distinct from the soul which properly seeth; he needeth an object, that is, a coloured body distant from him; he needeth the light of the sun, or of some other bright body; he needeth a medium, that is a

perspicuous body; he needeth a sensible species or form, to be carried from the object to the eye; he needeth a corporal organ, to wit, an eye furnished with humours and fleshy muscles; he needeth sensitive spirits and optic sinews, by which those spirits must pass; he needeth a proportionable distance; and lastly, he needeth the application of the seeing power or faculty. Behold how many things men and other living creatures want, to perform one action of life; but God, who truly hath all life in himself, needeth nothing. His infinite essence doth include power, form, object, light, and all other things. God of himself, by himself, and in himself, seeth all things, which are, have been, or shall be, and evidently knoweth all things which may be. And before the world was made, God saw all things, so that by the creation of things there came nothing but was before known unto him.

What, then, shalt thou be, my soul, when thou shalt partake of that life? Is it much that God commandeth thee, when he would have thee spend this corporal, animal, poor, and imperfect life, for himself and thy brethren, to obtain life eternal? And if he command not much, when he commandeth this life to be condemned, how light and little ought it to seem to thee, when he commandeth thee to bestow thy dead riches

upon the poor; to abstain from lust; to renounce the devil and his pomps, and with true devotion of heart to sigh after that life which only is true life.

CHAPTER VIII

GOD THE FOUNTAIN OF WISDOM

BUT it is time now to ascend as we may unto the Fountain of wisdom. *A fountain of wisdom, the word of God on high,** saith Ecclesiasticus: and rightly he saith, *on high*, because the Fountain of wisdom doth plentifully flow upon the holy angels and blessed souls in heaven; but unto us that inhabit this desert and pilgrimage, wisdom herself descendeth not, but a certain vapour or shadow thereof.

Wherefore, my soul, seek not after higher things than beseemeth thee;† *Do not search the Majesty, lest thou be oppressed of the glory.*‡ Admire his wisdom of whom the Apostle speaketh: *to God the only wise.*§ Congratulate those blessed spirits which drink of the Fountain of wisdom; and although they do not comprehend God, which only is proper unto the very fountain himself, yet they behold the face of God, which is the first cause, without veil or interposition,

* Eccli. i 5.

‡ Prov. xxv 27.

† Eccli. iii 22.

§ Rom. xvi 27.

and being irradiated with the brightness thereof, they judge truly of all things, not fearing in that meridian light of wisdom the darkness of errors, the blindness of ignorance or cloud of opinions. Seek after that happiness, and that thou mayest surely attain to it, love our Lord Jesus Christ with all thy heart, *in whom be all the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God.** For he hath said in his Gospel: *He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself to him.*† And what meaneth: *I will manifest myself to him*, but that I will manifest to him the treasures of wisdom and knowledge which are in me? Truly, every man doth naturally desire knowledge, and although carnal concupiscence doth now in many lull, as it were, this desire asleep; yet when this corruptible body shall be laid aside, which now dulleth the soul, then will the fire of this desire break forth more than any other.

How great will thy happiness be then, my soul, whenas thy lover and beloved, Christ, shall show thee *the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God*? But lest thou be frustrated of so great a hope, endeavour to keep the commandments of Christ; for he said: *If any love me, he will keep my word; and he that loveth me not,*

* Col. ii 3.

† John xiv 21.

*keepeth not my words.** And in the meanwhile, have thou that wisdom which holy Job describeth saying: *The fear of God, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil, understanding.†* And what goodness soever thou seest in creatures, acknowledge it to be derived from God, the fountain of all goodness, that here in the rivers of creatures thou mayest begin to taste of that fountain, as St Francis did. Whereof read St Bonaventura in the life of St Francis, the ninth chapter.

* John xiv 23, 24.

† Job xxviii 28



THE FIFTH STEP
*FROM THE CONSIDERATION OF
THE AIR*

CHAPTER I

THE BODY LIVETH BY BREATHING AIR, THE
SOUL BY PRAYER

THE element of air may be to men a notable document in manners, if the nature thereof be considered: for it not only teacheth them moral philosophy, but also declareth the mysteries of divinity, and elevateth the mind unto God, whenas the manifold commodities thereof are pondered, which by God's ordinance it affordeth unto mankind.

First, therefore, the air serveth for aspiration or breathing, and thereby preserveth the life of man and of terrestrial living creatures. Secondly, it is so necessary for sight, hearing, and speech, that without it, though nothing else were wanting, none could see, hear, or speak. Lastly, without air, there could be no motion among men and other terrestrial living creatures, so that all arts and sciences must needs cease

and have end. Let us begin with the first part.

If men would understand that the soul needeth her aspiration or breathing as much as the body, many should be saved which now perish. The soul needeth continual breathing, because the natural heat where-with the heart boileth, is so tempered by the lungs which draw in the cool air and cast out the hot, that life is thereby preserved; without which it could not be: whereupon it is commonly said that those things which breathe do live, and those things which breathe not live not. And thou, my soul, that thou mayest by God's grace live a spiritual life, dost also want thy continual breathing, which is performed by sending forth warm sighs in thy prayers to God, and receiving from God new grace of the Holy Ghost. For what else do these words of the Lord import: *It behoveth always to pray and not to be weary*,* but that thou must always sigh and receive a new spirit, that the spiritual life be not quenched in thee? Which thing he repeateth when he saith: *Watch, therefore, praying at all times*.† And the Apostle confirmeth the same in his first Epistle unto the Thessalonians, saying: *Pray without intermission*.‡ With whom agreeth

* Luke xviii 1.

† Luke xxi 36.

‡ 1 Thess. v 17.

St Peter the Apostle in his first Epistle whenas he writeth: *Be wise, therefore, and watch in prayers.** For true wisdom willeth us to ask God's help at all times, which at all times we stand in need of. Our heavenly Father knoweth, indeed, what we want, and is ready to give us abundantly, especially if it belong to our eternal salvation; but he will give it us by means of prayer, for that is more to his honour and to our profit, than if he should give us all things whenas we sleep and do nothing.

Therefore, our most liberal Lord doth exhort and urge us to ask when he saith: *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth: and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.*† And what is chiefly to be asked, and what without doubt shall be granted, he declareth a little after, saying: *If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father from heaven give the good Spirit to them that ask him?*‡ This good Spirit, therefore, is chiefly to be daily asked, which doubtless will be given us if it be well asked, whereby we may breathe in God, and by breathing in him preserve our spiritual life.

* 1 Pet. iv 7.

† Luke xi 9, 10.

‡ Luke xi 13.

So did holy David, who said in the Psalm: *I opened my mouth and drew breath.** That is: I opened my mouth, desiring, sighing, craving with inexplicable groans, and I drew the most sweet breath of God's Spirit, which hath cooled the heat of my concupiscence, and strengthened me in every good work. Which being so, who can say that they live to God who in whole days, months, and years, sigh not after him nor breathe in him? Not to breathe is an evident sign of death: therefore, if to pray be to breathe, it is an evident sign of death not to pray. The spiritual life, whereby we are made the sons of God, consisteth in charity: *see*, saith St John in his Epistle, *what manner of charity the Father hath given us, that we should be named and be the sons of God.*† And who is there that loveth, but desireth to see the thing he loveth? Who desireth anything and asketh not, when he knoweth that for asking it shall be given him? Therefore, he who doth not daily pray to see the face of his God, desireth not to see him: if he desireth not to see him, he loveth him not: if he loveth him not, he liveth not. What, then, followeth but that we account them dead to God, although they live to the world, which do not give themselves to prayer? And yet such are not said to pray and thereby to breathe

* Ps. cxviii 131.

† 1 John iii 1.

and live, which with their corporal voice pray only: for prayer is defined by the learned to be *an elevation of the mind unto God, and not of the voice into the air.*

Therefore, my soul, deceive not thyself, thinking thou dost live to God, unless thou seek God with all thy heart, and sigh after him day and night. Say not that thou canst not for other business give thyself to prayer and spiritual exercises; for the holy Apostles were most busied, but, indeed, in the work of God and salvation of souls, so that one of them said: *Beside those things which are outward: my daily instance, the carefulness of all churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is scandalized, and I am not burnt?** And yet the same Apostle beside the often commemoration of his prayers,† writeth unto the Philippians: *Our conversation is in heaven.‡* For in the midst of business, in desire he was in heaven, else would he not have said: *With Christ I am nailed to the Cross. And I live not now I: but Christ liveth in me.§*

* 2 Cor. xi 28, 29.

† Rom. i 10; 1 Thess. i 2; 2 Tim. i 3.

‡ Phil. iii 20.

§ Gal. ii 19, 20.

CHAPTER II

THE AIR CONSIDERED AS THE MEDIUM OF
LIVING, HEARING, AND SPEAKING

It is another property of the air to be the medium or means whereby colours and sounds come to our eyes and ears, without which we could not see, hear, or speak. Wherefore we ought greatly to thank God that it hath pleased him to beautify our nature with so singular a benefit. We ought also to admire the wisdom of our Maker in a work of so great subtlety; for although the air be a true body and so great that it filleth almost an infinite space, yet it is neither seen nor felt, by reason of the incredible rarity thereof. The ancients did wonder at the smallness of a line which Apelles had drawn with a pencil; but that line was seen and touched, and, therefore, not to be compared with the thinness of the air, which covereth and compasseth all, and yet is seen of none. And it is the more to be wondered that the air being so thin a body, yet being divided, it closeth again together with marvellous facility, and remaineth as if it had never been divided. Truly, it is not possible for an artisan so to amend a spider's broken cobweb, or the rent of a very thin veil, but that the former renting will appear. It is also most worthy

of admiration, and only belongeth to the wisdom of God, to cause innumerable kinds of colours to pass together without confusion through the same part of the air. For he who shall stand in a high and open place, in the evening when the moon shineth, and behold the heaven full of stars and fields full of flowers, with houses, trees, beasts, and other things of like sort, cannot deny but that the species or forms of those things are contained in the air next unto him altogether without confusion. For who can conceive this? For how can it be that so thin a body should contain together such variety of forms? And what if, at the same time and place, birds sing, instruments of music play, and waters falling make a noise; are not those sounds or forms of sounds received altogether, with so many colours or forms of colours in the same air? Who doth these things, O my soul, but thy Maker, *who only doth great wonders?** And if his works are so wonderful, how much more wonderful is he himself?

And another commodity also the air affordeth by reason of the exceeding rarity thereof: for it helpeth the motion of all things that remove from place to place. We all know with what labour ships are towed through the waters, albeit they are liquid

* Ps. cxxxv 4.

and easily divided. For sometimes neither winds nor oars suffice, but the strength of horses and buffaloes must be added. And if, perchance, a way is to be made through hills and mountains, though but short, yet in how long time and with what labour is it performed? But in the air horses run, birds fly, and arrows and darts are shot with great facility and speed; men also go up and down about their business and move their feet, arms, and hands, upward, downward, and on either side, and yet the air, though it be everywhere, and of a corporal nature, hindereth them no more than if it were a spirit or nothing at all.

CHAPTER III

IN THE AIR IS TO BE OBSERVED, AS IT WERE,
A TYPE OF THE SWEETNESS AND MERCY
OF GOD

LASTLY, the air giveth place to everything, changeth itself into every form, and is divided and broken for the commodity of men; so that it may seem to teach them humility, patience, and charity. It representeth likewise unto them the incredible sweetness and exceeding bounty of the Maker thereof.

Recollect, therefore, thyself, O my soul, and diligently consider that thy Lord God is always present with his creatures, and always

worketh with them, and, which is a token of infinite sweetness, co-operateth with the nature of every one, as if he should say with his Apostle: *To all I became all things that I might save all.** Necessary agents he causeth to work necessarily; voluntary agents, voluntarily; and free agents, freely. He moveth and helpeth the fire to ascend, the earth to descend, the water to run into steep places; the air to pass which way soever it is driven; the stars to move always circularly; herbs, shrubs, and plants to bear fruit according to their nature; beasts of the earth, fishes, and fowls to do such things as their kind doth require. And if the sweetness of God appeareth so plainly by co-operating with his creatures in the works of Nature, what shall we think of the works of grace? Truly God hath given man free will, yet so that it is ruled by his commandments, terrified by his punishments, and allured by his benefits. *God would have all men to be saved.*† Yet his will is that they also should have a will thereunto, and, therefore, he doth so sweetly prevent, incite, lead, and direct them, that it is admirable to consider. These are the inventions of God's wisdom whereof Isaias speaketh: *Make his inventions known among the people.*‡ Wicked men

* 1 Cor. ix 22.

† 1 Tim. ii 4.

‡ Isa. xii 4.

sometimes he doth vehemently terrify, sometimes lovingly exhort, sometimes mercifully admonish, as he thinketh most agreeable to their natures and conditions. Hear how mercifully God dealt with the first sinner. *Adam, saith he, where art thou? Who answering: I heard thy voice in Paradise, and I feared, because I was naked, and I hid me. God mercifully replied: Who hath told thee that thou wast naked, but that thou hast eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldst not eat?** And Adam, being admonished by this pious correction, did repent, for the Scripture saith: *She (to wit, the wisdom of God) kept him that was first made of God, Father of the world, and she brought him out of his sin.†* Hear again how mercifully God corrected the children of Israel by his angel, and provoked them to repentance: *The angel of our Lord went up (saith the Scripture), from Galgal to the place of weepers, and said: I brought you out of Egypt, and have brought you into the land, for the which I swear to your fathers: and I promised that I would not make frustrate my covenant for ever: only so that you should not make a league with the inhabitants of this land, but should overthrow their altars: and you would not hear my voice. Why have you done this? And when the angel of our Lord*

* Gen. iii 9-11.

† Wisd. x 1, 2.

spake these words to all the children of Israel : they lifted up their voice and wept. And the name of that place was called the place of weepers, or of tears : and there they im-molated hosts to the Lord.†* And that it was a great and general lamentation, and a sign of true repentance, the new name given to that place beareth perpetual record : for it was called *the place of weepers, or of tears*. What shall I say of the prophets ? They everywhere teach and proclaim that *God desireth not the death of sinners, but that they should be converted and live.‡* It is commonly said (saith God by Jeremias) : *if a man put away his wife, and she departing from him, marry another man, will he return to her any more ? But thou hast committed fornication with many lovers : nevertheless return unto me, saith our Lord, and I will receive thee.§* And by Ezechiel : *Thus you have spoken, saying : Our iniquities and our sins are upon us, and in them we fade away : how then can we live ? Say to them, live I, saith our Lord God ; I will not the death of the impious, but that the impious convert from his way and live. Convert, convert ye from your most evil ways ; and why will you die, O house of Israel ? ||* But to omit the wicked, none can

* *i.e.*, " sacrifices."

† Judg. ii 1, 2, 4, 5.

‡ Ezech. xviii 23.

§ Jer. iii 1.

|| Ezech. xxxiii 10, 11.

express the more than fatherly or motherly love which our Lord sheweth to those that fear and hope in him. David in the Psalms saith: *According to the height of heaven from earth, hath he strengthened his mercy upon them that fear him.** And after: *As a Father hath compassion on his children, so hath our Lord compassion on them that fear him.** And again: *The mercy of our Lord is from everlasting and unto everlasting, upon them that fear him.** And in another place: *Taste ye and see that our Lord is sweet: blessed is the man that hopeth in him.*† And again: *How good is God to Israel and to them that are of a right heart*‡—that is, who can express the great goodness, mercy, and sweetness of God unto righteous souls? God also saith by Isaias: *Can a woman forget her infant, that she will not have pity on the son of her womb? And if she should forget, yet will not I forget thee.*§ And Jeremias in his Lamentations: *Our Lord is my portion, said my soul: therefore will I expect him. Our Lord is good to them that hope in him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good to wait with silence for the salvation of God.*||

If I should set down, moreover, what the Apostles say in their Epistles of the love of

* Ps. cii 11, 13, 17.

† Ps. lxxii 1.

|| Lam. iii 24-26.

† Ps. xxxiii 9.

§ Isa. xlix 15.

God towards the righteous, I should never make an end. Let that stand for all which St Paul hath writ in the beginning of his last Epistle to the Corinthians: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation: that we also may be able to comfort them that are in all distress.** He saith not, God is a comforter, but most full of *all comfort*; not that he comforteth us in some tribulation, but in *all tribulation*; not that we may be able to comfort them that are in some distress, but in *all distress*. So that he could not more set forth the sweetness and mercy of God to those whom he loveth and by whom he is beloved.

But to conclude, it shall not be amiss to set down the words of St Prosper, in which he declareth the mercy of God not only to the righteous, but also to the wicked, to make them righteous: *Grace, saith he, doth chiefly excel all justification, by persuading with exhortations, by admonishing with examples, by terrifying with dangers, by inciting with miracles, by giving understanding, by inspiring counsel, by illuminating the heart and induing it with the affections of faith. But yet man's will is joined and adjoined thereunto; which, therefore, is incited thereto by the former helps,*

* 2 Cor. i 3, 4.

that it should co-operate with the divine work in itself, and begin to use for merit what from heavenly seed it conceived for exercise, proceeding from self-inconstancy if it decay, and from the assistance of grace if it increase ; which assistance is given unto all by innumerable ways, either secret or manifest : and that it is refused of many, proceedeth from their wickedness ; but that it is received of many is a work of God's grace and man's will. Thus he.*

CHAPTER IV

EXHORTATION OF THE SOUL TO THE IMITATION
OF THE BENIGNITY OF GOD

Go to now, my soul, if thy maker be so sweet and merciful: suffering sinners with incredible benignity, that he may convert them; and comforting the righteous, that they may increase the more in virtue: oughtest not thou to bear meekly with thy neighbours, and to become all things to all men, that thou mayest gain all unto thy Lord God?† Think with thyself to what high excellency the Apostle doth exhort thee, when he saith: *Be ye, therefore, followers of God, as most dear children : and walk in love, as Christ also loved us, and delivered himself for us an oblation and host to God in an odour of sweetness.‡*

* *De vocat. gent.*, II, c. 26. † 1 Cor. ix 19.

‡ Eph. v 2.

Imitate God the Father, *who maketh his sun to rise upon good and bad, and raineth upon just and unjust.** Imitate God the Son, who, taking human nature, spared not his own life to deliver us from the power of darkness and eternal damnation. Imitate God the Holy Ghost, who infuseth plentifully his most precious gifts into us, to make us, being carnal, to become spiritual.

* Matt. v 45.



THE SIXTH STEP
FROM THE CONSIDERATION OF
FIRE

CHAPTER I

THE HATRED OF GOD AGAINST SIN IS AS A
CONSUMING FIRE

THE element of fire is so pure and noble, that God himself would be called Fire, as Moses and St Paul witness, saying: *Our God is a consuming fire.** And when God first appeared unto Moses, he appeared in a flame of fire, burning a bush and not consuming it: *Our Lord appeared, saith Moses, in a flame of fire, out of the midst of a bush: and he saw that the bush was on fire, and was not burnt.*† And when the same God came to give the Law unto the people, he came in the form of fire. For so speaketh Moses: *All the Mount Sinai smoked: for because our Lord was descended upon it in fire.*‡ According to the similitude of which mystery, whenas the new law was to be promulgated, the Holy Ghost appeared unto

* Deut. iv 24; Heb. xii 29.

† Exod. iii 2.

‡ Exod. xix 18.

the Apostles in fiery tongues. Those spirits also which are most near to God in heaven are called seraphims—that is to say, fiery—because they are more inflamed with the fire of divine love than other angels. Which being so, it is not a thing difficult for us, from the element of fire, and the nature and properties thereof, to frame a step by which through prayer and meditation we may ascend unto God. For surely it is more easy to ascend with Elias in a chariot of fire, than of earth, water, or air to make a ladder.

Let us, therefore, consider the properties of the fire! The fire is of such a nature, that in divers things it worketh after a diverse, and often after a contrary manner. Wood, hay, and stubble it burneth presently: gold, silver, and precious stones it maketh more pure and bright. Iron, which of its own nature is black, cold, hard, and heavy, the fire so changeth into contrary qualities, that forthwith it becometh white, hot, soft, and light, yea, to shine like a star, to burn like fire, to melt like water, and to be so light that the smith may easily move and remove it as he pleaseth.

All these things do manifestly agree unto almighty God. For wood, hay, and stubble, according to the Apostle in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, signify evil works, which

cannot endure the fire of God's judgement.* And truly it is incredible how greatly all sin displeaseth God, who is a most pure fire, and with what zeal he consumeth and destroyeth it, if by repentance it may be destroyed—that is, if the sinner be in haste to repent. But if he be not capable of repentance, as the devils are not, nor men after this life, then is God's wrath turned upon him. *For to God the impious and his impiety are odious alike,*† saith the wise man. And how exceeding great this hate is, the devil can witness, who sinned once, and being a most noble angel, and, as St Gregory saith, prince of the first order, and the most excellent of God's creatures, was notwithstanding presently cast down from heaven, deprived of all beauty and supernatural grace, changed into a most deformed monster, and condemned unto eternal punishment.‡ Our Saviour Christ can witness, who descended from heaven to destroy the works of the devil, to wit sins, and, therefore, he is called the *Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world.*§ But who is able to conceive what our Saviour suffered *to destroy the works of the devil,*|| and perfectly to satisfy the justice of God? *Who when he was in the form of God, took*

* 1 Cor. iii 12, 13.

‡ *Moral.*, xxxiii 24.

|| 1 John iii 8.

† *Wisd.* xiv 9.

§ John i 29.

the form of a servant : being made poor for us whenas he was rich.† He had not where to repose his head,‡ albeit he made heaven and earth. He came unto his own, and his own received him not.§ Who when he was reviled, did not revile : when he suffered, he threatened not, but delivered himself to him that judged him unjustly : who himself bare our sins in his body upon the tree.|| He humbled himself, made obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross.¶ By whose stripes we are healed.** Lastly, he was mocked, spitten upon, whipped, crowned with thorns, and being crucified with exceeding ignominy and pain, he rendered up his life, to destroy the works of the devil, and to wipe away our sins. The law of God can witness, which prohibiteth and punisheth all sin; yea, leaveth not one idle word unpunished.†† How greatly then doth God abhor enormous crimes, that cannot endure one idle word? The law of our Lord is immaculate, the precept of our Lord lightsome,‡‡ detesting sin and darkness, for between light and darkness, justice and iniquity, there can be no society.§§ Hell also can witness which God hath*

* Phil. ii 6, 7.

‡ Luke ix 58.

|| I Pet. ii 23, 24.

** I Pet. ii 24.

‡‡ Ps. xviii 8, 9.

† 2 Cor. viii 9.

§ John i 11.

¶ Phil. ii 8.

†† Matt. xii 36.

§§ 2 Cor. vi 14.

prepared for sinners, who whenas they had time, neglected or refused to be washed with the blood of the immaculate Lamb. For it is just that they who have committed eternal sins should have eternal punishments. But what and how great the pains of hell are is horrible to think. Whereof we will speak more in the last step.

Therefore, my soul, since God's hatred is so great against sin, if thou lovest God above all things, thou oughtest also to hate sin above all things. Take heed they deceive thee not, who use to extenuate or excuse sin. Look also that thou deceive not thyself with false reasons; for if sin displease thee not both in thyself and others, thou lovest not God, and if thou lovest not God, thou art undone. Again, if thou be not ungrateful unto Christ, how greatly mayest thou reckon thyself indebted to his love, labours, blood, and death, who hath washed thee from sin and reconciled thee to his Father. And shall it then be grievous unto thee, to suffer somewhat for Christ, or for his sake by his grace to resist sin even unto blood? Lastly, if thou canst not patiently endure the hell of eternal fire, surely thou oughtest not patiently to endure sin, but as from the face of a serpent fly from it,* and from every light occasion of suspicion thereof. Endeavour

* Eccli. xxi 2.

vour, therefore, all thou mayest to hate sin above all things, and to love God above all things.

CHAPTER II

FIRE PERFECTETH THE NOBLER METALS, AND
GOD CROWNETH THE GOOD WORKS OF MAN

THE fire also destroyeth not but perfecteth and purifieth gold, silver, and precious stones; for as the same Apostle doth there declare, those metals signify good and perfect works, which are approved by the fire of God's judgement,* and have a great reward. These works God doth approve because they are his gifts, and when he crowneth our merits, saith St Augustine, he crowneth his gifts.† For they are done by his commandments, assistance and power, and by the law and precepts which he hath appointed.

Gold also signifieth the *works of charity* : and how can the works of charity but please God, since God himself is charity?‡ Silver signifieth the works of wisdom, to wit of them that instruct many unto justice.§ And they also are very pleasing and acceptable unto God, for the wisdom of God saith: *He that*

* 1 Cor. iii 13.

† *Enerrat. in Ps. lxx, serm. 2, No. 5.*

‡ 1 John iv 8.

§ Dan. xii 3.

*shall do and teach, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.** Precious stones are the works of a continent soul, of which Ecclesiasticus speaketh: *All weight is not worthy a continent soul.†* And that is the cause why in the office of the Church, the Gospel of *one precious pearl found* is read in the praise of holy virgins.‡ And how greatly the purity of virginity is pleasing to God may be understood by the prophet Isaias, who by God's appointment and in his name prophesied unto such eunuchs as have gelt themselves for the kingdom of heaven.§ *I will give unto them in my house and in my walls a place and a name better than sons and daughters; an everlasting name will I give them which shall not perish.||* Which place St Augustine in his Book of holy Virginity, excellently declareth to be understood of holy virgins of either sex.¶ And these three sorts of works, by the consent of Doctors, are rewarded with crowns of gold in the kingdom of heaven. For crowns of gold, to wit, certain rewards beside eternal life, are given to Martyrs, Doctors, and Virgins. To Martyrs for their excellent charity, because *greater love than this no man*

* Matt. v 19

† Eccli. xxvi 20.

‡ Miss. Ro.m., de commun. virg.

§ Matt. xix 12.

|| Isa. lvi 5.

¶ De s. virginit., c. 24, 25.

*hath, that a man yield his life for his friends.** To Doctors, for their excellent wisdom, of whom Daniel speaketh: *They that instruct many to justice shall shine as stars unto perpetual eternities;†* to Virgins, for their valuable chastity, for which cause the virgins in the Apocalypse are said to sing a new song that no man else could say: *These are they,* saith St John, *which were not defiled with women. For they are virgins, and follow the Lamb whithersoever he shall go.‡*

Neither shall the charity of Martyrs, wisdom of Doctors, and purity of Virgins only be approved by the fire of God's judgement, and fully rewarded: but also all other good works done in charity shall be esteemed as vessels of gold and endure that divine fire and receive their reward. For to them will our Lord say at the day of judgement: *Come ye blessed of my Father, possess you the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world;§* you who have given bread to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, lodging to strangers, clothing to the naked, and comfort to the sick and such as are in prison. And the same Lord promiseth also that whosoever shall out of charity give a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple shall not lose his reward.||

* John xv 13. † Dan. xii 3. ‡ Apoc. xiv 3, 4.
§ Matt. xxv 34. || Matt. x 42.

Dost thou understand, O my soul, how great is the difference of works? And what then can be more fond and miserable than, having time and place wherein, if thou be wise, thou mayest easily gather gold, silver, and precious stones, to seek rather with great labour after wood, hay, and stubble? *O that thou wert wise and understood, and would provide for the last things,** when all these works shall be examined and tried in the fire of God's judgement, and the former shall be praised and crowned, but the latter shall be burned to smoke and ashes. Why dost thou now choose that which doubtless thou wilt repent to have chosen? And why dost thou not now for thy profit dislike, what hereafter thou wilt without profit condemn? And if perhaps thou seest it not now, for that the veil of things present is drawn before thine eyes, that they cannot behold the clear and simple truth; pray unto God, and with great devotion say unto him with the blind man in the Gospel: *Lord grant that I may see,†* and with the prophet: *Reveal mine eyes and I shall consider the marvellous things of thy law.‡* For truly it is marvellous that works done in charity, become gold, silver, and precious stones: but such as are not done in charity are turned to wood, hay, and stubble.

* Deut. xxxii 22, 29; Eccli. vii 40.

† Luke xviii 41.

‡ Ps. cxviii 18.

CHAPTER III

FIRE CAUSETH BRIGHTNESS IN BLACK IRON;
GOD LEADETH THE SINFUL SOUL TO
KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH

LET us now consider the other property of the fire. For hitherto we have learned from it what God doth with those that depart out of this life with evil works, or in good works persevere unto the end. Now by another resemblance, taken also from the fire, we may understand what God worketh in those whom he calleth from sin to repentance.

A sinner is like iron, which so long as it is kept far from the fire, is black, cold, hard, and heavy: but if it be put in the fire it becometh white, hot, soft, and light. Every sinner wanteth inward light and walketh in darkness and therein resembleth the blackness of iron: for although he seem skilful in human science, and excel in understanding and judgement therein, yet is he blind in judgement of the true good and evil and more miserable than any blind man. For a blind man seeth nothing, and therefore goeth not without a guide: but a sinful man thinketh that he seeth what he seeth not, or seeth one thing for another; judging good evil and evil good, great little and little

great, long short and short long; and therefore he is ever deceived in his choice. So speaketh the Apostle concerning the Paynim idolaters: *Having their understanding obscure with darkness, by the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.** Therefore our Lord himself also in the Gospel doth so often reprove the Scribes and Pharisees, saying: They were blind and guides of the blind.† And the prophet Isaias, speaking to the Jews of his time, saith: *Hear, ye deaf, and, ye blind, behold to see,*‡ to whom he prophesieth that Christ should come and open the eyes of the blind: and speaking of the New Testament in the person of God, he addeth: *And I will lead the blind into the way which they know not, and in paths which they were ignorant of . . . I will make darkness light before them and crooked things straight.*§ Moreover, the wicked after this life will confess that this is true, when their punishments shall begin to open the eyes of their minds, which their offences had shut: *We therefore (say they) have erred from the way of truth, and the light of justice hath not shined to us, and the sun of understanding rose not to us.*|| Neither is it to be marvelled, although they are blind which are averted

* Eph. iv 18.

† Matt. xv 14; Luke vi 39.

‡ Isa. xlii 18.

§ Isa. xlii 16.

Wisd. v 6.

from God in understanding and will, *for God is light and no darkness is in him.** Whereupon the same Apostle concludeth: *He that saith he is in the light and hateth his brother, is in the darkness even till now,* and a little after: *He that hateth his brother is in darkness and walketh in the darkness and knoweth not whither he goeth, because darkness hath blinded his eyes.†*

Neither is it the only cause of blindness in sinners for that they are turned from God who is Light; but also because *their malice hath blinded them,‡* as the wise man speaketh; for love, hatred, anger, envy, and other such like passions of the mind, which are comprehended under the name of malice, so blind the mind that it cannot see the truth; and they are as coloured spectacles, which make white things seem red; or else so framed that they make great things seem small, or small things seem great, things far off seem near, and things near seem far off. He that is in love, thinketh the thing he loveth most fair, profitable, and necessary and before all things to be procured. Again, he that hateth the same thing, judgeth it most deformed, unprofitable, evil, and hurtful, and before all other things to be forsaken. But if this black and deformed iron be put

* 1 John i 5.

† 1 John ii 9, 11.

‡ Wisd. ii 21.

into the fire, that is, if the sinner begin to avert from sin, and convert himself to God, according to that of the prophet: *Come ye to him and be illuminated*,* then he beginneth by little and little to receive light, and to see the truth in that light, according to the saying of the same prophet: *In thy light we shall see light*.† And then breaking in pieces the coloured spectacles of passion, and taking the crystalline of pure charity, he will esteem eternal things great, and temporal things small and of no moment, as indeed they are.

Then he shall clearly see that no created beauty is to be compared with that Light of wisdom and truth which is God and in God. So that he may cry out with St Augustine: *Late have I loved thee, O ancient beauty but new to me, late have I loved thee*.‡ And because Christ saith: *Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall deliver you*,§ he that is so illuminated with the light of truth and freed from the bonds of concupiscence, covetousness, ambition, and other passions, may rejoice with the prophet and say: *Thou, O Lord, hast broken my bonds: I will sacrifice to thee the host of praise, and I will invoke the name of the Lord*.||

* Ps. xxxiii 6.

‡ Confess., X, c. 27.

§ John viii 32.

† Ps. xxxv 10.

|| Ps. cxv 7, 8.

CHAPTER IV

A BURNING FIRE WELDETH COLD IRON; THE
GRACE OF GOD RESTORETH STRENGTH TO
MEN'S WORDS AND DEEDS

MOREOVER, the fire doth not only make iron that is black to become bright, but also that which is cold to become hot, yea, so fiery and burning that it seemeth to be fire itself. Great is our Lord and great is his power, which causeth a man that is cold by nature, and fearful to speak or to undertake any difficult thing, so soon as he is heat with the fire of charity, to become as bold as a lion that terrifieth all with his roaring and vanquisheth all with his pugnacity, and to whom nothing seemeth difficult; so that he may say with the Apostle Paul, who was greatly inflamed with this fire: *I can all things in him that strengtheneth me.**

But let us speak particularly of this efficacy of the fire; and first let us briefly treat of the efficacy of words and then of the efficacy of deeds.

There are at this day many preachers of God's Word in the Church, and ever have been. What then is the cause that notwithstanding the exhortations and exclamations of so many men, so few are converted?

* Phil. iv 13.

Truly in great towns every day in the Lent, twenty, thirty, or forty orators declaim, and yet when Lent is done, there appeareth almost no change in the manners of the citizens and townsmen: the same vices, the same sins, the same coldness, the same looseness is still seen. I find no other cause hereof, but that for the most part learned, eloquent, and copious sermons are preached; but the soul is wanting, the life is wanting, the fire is wanting; in a word, that great charity is wanting which only can quicken and animate the words of the speakers, and change the hearts of the hearers. Neither say I this, but that many preachers have loudness of voice and action of body: for guns without either bullet or stone make a great noise when they are discharged, but to no purpose: that which is desired, is, that they should show great zeal to God and the gaining of souls, not feignedly, but truly; not strained, but naturally flowing from the fountain of the heart. St Peter was ignorant of rhetoric; he only was expert in guiding his boat and in casting and amending his nets: yet so soon as the Holy Ghost descended upon him in fiery tongues, and replenished him with fervent charity, he presently began to speak so powerfully, fervently, and effectuously in the midst of the city Jerusalem, that with one sermon he converted many

thousands to believe and to do penance.* Yet we read not that in his sermons he used much straining of the voice or wearisome motion of the body.

St Bonaventura reporteth that St Francis was unlearned, and that he never studied the art of rhetoric: yet when he preached to the people, he was heard as an angel from heaven; for his words, saith he, were like burning fire inflaming the heart, and (as is related in the Chronicles of the Minors, cap. 30) when once after dinner he spake on the sudden a few words to the people, they were all so moved to repentance that the same day seemed Good Friday.† Whence proceedeth so great fruit from so few words? Truly because that holy preacher was *like a burning coal, and his words as a burning torch*, as Ecclesiasticus writ of Elias.‡ We have the written sermons of St Vincentius, St Bernardino, and some other saints, which scarce any will vouchsafe to read, because of the exceeding plainness of style which is found in them; and yet we know that by their preaching many thousands of men have been converted to God, and themselves were ever heard with incredible concourse and attention, because indeed their

* Acts ii 14 *sqq.*

† *Vita S Franc.*, c. 2.

‡ Eccli. xlviii 1.

plain and simple words proceeded from fiery and zealous hearts.

Moreover, the efficacy of this divine fire is showed as much in deeds as in words. God determined by St Peter the Apostle to subdue Rome, the chief city of the Empire and Lady of Nations, unto himself. He determined also to send the rest of the Apostles, some into Ethiopia, some into India, some into Scythia, some into the farthest parts of Brittany, to destroy by them the idols of the world, to erect the standard of the Cross, to change laws and customs, and to overthrow the tyranny of the devil. If anyone had foretold these things unto the Apostles, when they fished in the Lake of Genesareth, or when they fled away and hid themselves at our Lord's Passion, they would have seemed as dreams or old wives' tales. And yet soon after all these things came to pass, and by no other force but by the fire of charity which the Holy Ghost enkindled in their hearts: *For charity casteth out fear,* suffereth all things, hopeth all things;† thinketh all things possible and crieth out with the Apostle: I can all things in him that strengtheneth me.‡*

So that we see by the work and labour of these men, only armed with charity, idolatry

* 1 John iv 18.

† 1 Cor. xiii 7.

‡ Phil. iv 13.

was in short time extinguished throughout the world, churches everywhere founded to the honour of Christ, and the standard of the Cross, without army of soldiers, or provision of war, erected in all kingdoms.

CHAPTER V

FIRE MAKETH HARD IRON SOFT; THE GRACE OF
GOD CONQUERETH THE HARDNESS OF THE
HEART

THE fire also hath a property to make hard iron so soft that it may be easily attenuated and extended into plates and brought to any form. Fire hath great power over iron, but the power of God over the obstinate and obdurate hearts of men is far greater. Hear St Bernard in his books of Consideration: *It is only a hard heart (saith he) that abhorreth not itself, because it feeleth not. What then is a hard heart? It is that which is neither cut with compunction, mollified with piety, nor moved with prayers. It careth not for threats, by punishments it is hardened. It is ungrateful for benefits, incredulous to counsel.* And after: *It is that which neither feareth God nor man.** All which to be true Pharaoh can witness, who, the more he was punished by God, the more he was hardened; and the

* Bk. I, c. 2.

more God's mercy appeared in removing his punishment, the more was he animated to despise and contemn God. But when our Lord is pleased to enkindle one spark of the fire of his true love in a hard heart, presently it waxeth soft and melteth like wax; so that no obstinacy (though never so continual and obdurate) can hinder it: and of a heart of stone, it becometh a heart of flesh:★ for when the spirit of the Lord bloweth, waters will flow from the frozen snow.† We have an example in the Gospel of that woman that was a sinner in the city, whom neither the admonitions of her brother, reprehensions of her sister, honour of her family, nor her own shame, could move to abstain from sin; and yet one beam of Christ piercing her heart, and there enkindling a spark of divine love, did so strangely alter her; that being a noble woman, she blushed not in a public feast to cast herself at Christ's feet. And all weeping, with her tears she bathed them and with her hair instead of a towel she wiped them. Oftentimes most lovingly she kissed them, and with a most precious and odoriferous ointment anointed them, signifying thereby that from thenceforth she bequeathed herself and all that was hers unto the service of Christ.‡ Therefore, she did deserve to

★ Ezech. xi 19, xxxvi 26.

† Ps. cxlvii 18.

‡ Luke vii 37 *sqq.*

hear that saying of our Saviour: *Many sins are forgiven her, because she hath loved much.**

But it shall not be from our purpose to set down another example, also of later time. William, Duke of Aquitaine, lived in the time of St Bernard; a man most wilful and obstinate in defending Anacletus, the schismatical Pope, against Innocentius the lawful. He banished all the Catholic bishops out of his country, and took an oath that he would never be at peace with them: and because all men knew him obdurate in wickedness and cruelty and terrible for his pride, there was none that durst admonish him. It pleased God by his servant Bernard to visit the hard heart of this man and to kindle a great spark of divine love therein. Presently of a lion he became a lamb, humble of proud, and most obedient of most obstinate. For at one only word of St Bernard, he friendly embraced the Bishop of Poitiers, and with his own hand placed him in his chair; and (which seemeth to surpass all admiration) demanding of a certain hermit remedy of soul for his sins past, he was commanded by the same hermit to wear a coat of brass next his skin, so buckled that it could never be put off, and presently he obeyed, and it was so done. And being sent by the hermit to the Pope for absolution, he went. But

* Luke vii 47.

the Pope, suspecting that he did not heartily repent, or else desirous to try his patience, commanded him to go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem to demand absolution of the Patriarch of that city. Without delay he undertook the journey, and fulfilled the Pope's commandment. Lastly of a potent prince he became a humble monk, so that in that age there was scarce any found to surpass him in humility, patience, poverty, devotion, and piety. *This, indeed, is the change of the right hand of the highest.** This is the force of the divine fire, against which no hard heart can resist.†

CHAPTER VI

FIRE EXTENUATETH HEAVY THINGS; THE GRACE
OF GOD DIRECTETH SOULS IN THE WAY
OF JUSTICE

THERE remaineth the last property of the fire, which is to extenuate heavy things, and cause them easily to mount aloft. And this is the cause why men that burn not with the fire of divine love are heavy of heart, and to them the prophet said: *How long are you of heavy heart? Why love you vanity and seek lying?‡* This also is the cause why

* Ps. lxxvi 11.

† Cf. Bellarmine, On Grace and Free-Will, VI, c. 14.—ED.

‡ Ps. iv 3.

the body that is corrupted burdeneth the soul, as the wise man saith. And an heavy yoke upon the children of Adam, from the day of their coming forth of their mother's womb; until the day of their burying, unto the mother of all,† saith Ecclesiasticus. And what this heavy yoke is, which in this mortal body so burdeneth the soul, the same author declareth a little after, when he addeth: fury, envy, wavering, fear, anger,‡ and such like, commonly called the passions of the mind. These so depress the mind of man that it beholdeth nothing but earth, to which it cleaveth in such sort that it cannot ascend to seek God, nor speedily run the way of his commandments. But when the fire of God beginneth from above to inflame it, forthwith those passions begin to diminish and be mortified, and this heavy burden to wax lighter; and if the heat increase it will so unburden the heart that it may fly up like a dove, and say with the Apostle: *Our conversation is in Heaven.*§ And being also dilated with this fire it may say with David: *I have run the way of thy commandments, when thou hast dilated my heart.*|| Truly, since our Saviour said: *I came to cast fire on the earth, and what will I, but that it be**

* Wisd. ix 15.

† Eccli. xl 4.

|| Ps. cxviii 32.

† Eccli. xl 1.

§ Phil. iii 20.

*kindled?** we have seen many so enlightened therewith that they have wholly forsaken the love of honour, pleasure, and wealth, and have said to Christ ascending into heaven: *draw us after thee.*†

This hath caused so many monasteries to be erected, so many deserts to be inhabited, so many companies of virgins to be instituted, who did not only with ease run the way of the commandments, but also ascended into the way of counsels: *To follow the Lamb whithersoever he shall go.*‡

O blessed fire, which giveth light and wasteth not, and if it waste, it wasteth but the peccant humours, that life be not extinguished thereby. Who will cause me to be inflamed with this fire, which with the light of true wisdom expelleth the darkness of ignorance, and blindness of an erroneous conscience? And which changeth the coldness of sloth, indevotion, and negligence, into the heat of love, that it never suffer my heart to be hardened, but with the heat thereof to be mollified and made devout; and that it take from it the heavy yoke of earthly cares and desires, that with the wings of holy contemplation—wherewith charity is nourished and increased—it may

* Luke xii 49.

† Cant. i 3.

‡ Apoc. xiv 4.

ASCENT OF THE MIND TO GOD

be so lifted up that I may say with the prophet: *Make joyful the soul of thy servant, because to thee, O Lord, I have lifted up my soul.**

* Ps. lxxxv 4.



THE SEVENTH STEP

FROM THE CONSIDERATION OF HEAVEN, TO WIT, OF THE SUN, MOON AND STARS

CHAPTER I

THE SUN, AS THE TABERNACLE OF THE MOST
HIGH AND EXCEEDING BEAUTIFUL GOD

WE shall not labour much in this place from the consideration of heaven to frame for ourselves a step to contemplate God, for we have the kingly prophet going before us, who in the Psalms saith: *The heavens show forth the glory of God, and the firmament declareth the works of his hands.** And because there are two seasons, to wit, the day and the night, in which we may from the consideration of heaven ascend unto God with the wings of contemplation, of the first he writeth in the same psalm: *He put his tabernacle in the sun, and himself as a bridegroom, coming forth of his bride-chamber. He hath rejoiced as a giant to run the way, his coming forth from the top of heaven, and his recourse even to the top thereof: neither is*

* Ps. xviii 1.

*there that can hide himself from his heat.**
Of the latter he writeth in another psalm:
*I shall see the heavens, the works of thy fingers,
the moon and the stars, which thou hast
founded.†*

Let us begin with the first season. Of the sun which daily we behold, the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David singeth four prayers: first, that it is God's tabernacle; secondly, that it is exceeding beautiful; thirdly, that it always runneth most swiftly without stay; fourthly, that by giving light and heat the virtue thereof especially appeareth. By reason of all which, Ecclesiasticus hath written: *A marvellous instrument, the work of the highest. Great is our Lord that made it.‡*

First then, God, who hath framed all things, hath put his tabernacle in the sun, as in a most noble creature, for that among all corporal things he hath chosen the sun as a princely palace or divine sanctuary to dwell in. God truly filleth heaven and earth,§ and the heaven and Heaven of Heavens contain him not,|| and yet he is said to dwell there chiefly, whereby working marvellous things he sheweth greater signs of his presence. And because the Hebrew text saith, he hath put a tabernacle for the sun

* Ps. xviii 6, 7.

† Eccli. xliii 2, 5.

|| 2 Paralip. ii 6.

‡ Ps. viii 4.

§ Jer. xxiii 24.

in them, to wit, in the heavens; we gather by this place of the psalm another excellency of the sun which doth not contradict the former. The sun is a great thing, for which God hath prepared a most spacious, beautiful, and noble palace; for he would have heaven itself to be the palace of the sun, that it might therein freely walk and work, and the sun to be the palace of himself who ruleth all. As therefore we know the great excellency of the sun, because that heaven is the tabernacle thereof, so we may know the great excellence of God, because the sun is his tabernacle; a marvellous instrument doubtless, than the which there is nothing among corporal creatures more to be admired.

Moreover, David, to declare by things known the excellent beauty of the sun, compared it to a bridegroom coming forth of his bride-chamber: for men never adorn themselves more, or seek more to show their comeliness and beauty than when they are bridegrooms, for then they exceedingly desire to please the eyes of their spouse, whom they most dearly love. But if we were so near the sun as to discern what and how great it is, we should not then need to use the resemblance of a bridegroom, to conceive the incredible beauty thereof. Truly the beauty of colours dependeth of light, and the light failing, the beauty of colours soon fadeth

away. Nothing, therefore, is more beautiful than light. For which cause God, who is beauty itself, would be called Light. *God, saith St John, is light, and no darkness is in him.** Among corporal things also, there is nothing brighter than the sun, and therefore nothing more beautiful than it. The beauty of things below, and especially of men, fadeth in short time, but the beauty of the sun is never altered or diminished, but at all times with equal brightness shineth unto all. Do we not see how all things, as it were, rejoice at the rising of the sun? Men go about their business cheerfully, the winds blow sweetly, the flowers open, the herbs spring up, and the birds sing pleasantly. Whereupon, the old, blind Tobias, when the angel said unto him, *Joy be to thee always,* replied: *What joy shall be to me which sit in darkness and see not the light of heaven?†*

Consider then, my soul, and think with thyself; if the created sun doth so rejoice everything at his rising, what will the increated Son do (which is without comparison more beautiful and bright) when to the clean of heart he shall rise not to be seen for a time, but for all eternity! And how sorrowful and unhappy will that hour be to the wicked, when they shall be sent away to be buried in eternal darkness, where neither the increated

* 1 John i 5. † Tob. v 11, 12.

nor created sun shall ever shine! How great joy, then, shall that soul have to whom the *Father of Light** shall say: *Enter into the joy of thy Lord!*†

CHAPTER II

FROM THE COURSE OF THE SUN IS EVIDENT THE
GREATNESS OF GOD

AFTER the same prophet doth extol the course of the sun, which also is very admirable: *He hath rejoiced*, saith he, *as a giant to run his way.*‡

A giant truly, if he extend his steps according to the greatness of his body and run as fast as his strength will afford, will in a short time pass a long way. And, indeed, the prophet having compared the sun unto a bridegroom, thereby to declare its beauty; after also compareth it to a giant, that by that resemblance he might in some sort show the most speedy course thereof. But albeit he had not compared it to a giant, but to the flight of birds and arrows, or to the winds and lightning, yet should it have been far from the thing indeed. For if that be true which with our eyes we see, to wit, that the sun in four and twenty hours passeth about the whole compass of his orb, and if the

* Jas. i 17.

† Matt. xxv 21.

‡ Ps. xviii 6.

compass of the sun's orb exceedeth almost without comparison the compass of the earth, and if the compass of the earth containeth about twenty thousand miles, all which is most true, it must then needs follow that the sun every hour moveth many thousand miles; and why say I every hour, nay, every quarter of an hour, yea, almost every minute? For whosoever shall observe the rising or setting of the sun, in an open horizon, as at sea, or in a plain field, shall perceive the whole body of the sun to ascend above the horizon in less space than the eighth part of an hour. And yet the diameter of the sun's body is much greater than the diameter of the earth, which, notwithstanding, containeth seven thousand miles. I myself being once desirous to know in what space of time the sun set at sea, at the beginning thereof I began to read the Psalm *Miserere mei Deus*,* and scarce had read it twice over, before the sun was wholly set. It needs must be, therefore, that the sun in that short time in which the Psalm *Miserere* was twice read over, did run much more than the space of seven thousand miles. Who would believe this, unless certain reason did demonstrate it? And now if any should say, moreover, that this body, which is so swiftly moved, is much greater than the whole earth, and that

* Ps 1.

the motion thereof is performed without ceasing or weariness, so that if God should so command, it might continue for all eternity: surely, if he were not insensible, he could not but wonder at the infinite power of God. Truly, therefore, writeth Ecclesiasticus: *That this is a marvellous instrument, the work of the highest, and great (doubtless) is our Lord that made it.**

CHAPTER III

THE SUN GIVETH LIGHT AND HEAT; GOD ALSO
GIVETH WISDOM AND CHARITY

THERE remaineth also the efficacy of the sun's light and heat, whereof David speaketh: *Neither is there that can hide himself from his heat.†* This one bright body being placed in the midst of the world giveth light to all the stars, to all the air, to all the sea, and to all the earth, and with his quickening heat causeth all plants, corn, and trees throughout the world to bud, blossom, and bear fruit: and under the earth it also produceth all kinds of metals. Wherefore St James, in the beginning of his Epistle, compareth the sun to God: *Every best gift, saith he, and every perfect gift is from above, descending from the Father of Lights, with whom is no transmutation*

* Eccli. xliii 2, 5.

† Ps. xviii 2.

*nor shadowing of alteration.** The sun, indeed, is the father of corporal light, as God is the Father of spiritual light; yet in three things there is great unlikeness between God and the sun.

First, the sun needeth continual transmutation to give light and heat to the whole world; but God is wholly everywhere and needeth no transmutation. And therefore St James saith: *With whom there is no transmutation.**

Secondly, the sun, for that it always changeth places, causeth by turn day to some and night to others, shining to one people and setting to another: but God is never changed, and yet is present with every one, and therefore St James addeth: *There is with him no shadowing of alteration.*

Lastly, which is the chief, from the sun (the father of corporal light) all things proceed which grow on earth: and those things are good. Yet not excellent nor perfect, but small, temporal, and transitory, and which make not men good, because they may be abused, as they are by many to their destruction. But from God, the Father of spiritual light, *every best gift and every perfect gift doth descend*, by which the possessors thereof are made better and more perfect. These gifts none can abuse, and whosoever

* Jas. i 17

persevereth in them unto the end shall come to that true happiness which is a state of all good things perfectly united together.

Seek, therefore, my soul, what these best gifts and perfect gifts are, which come from above and descend from the Father of Light; and when thou hast found them, endeavour all thou canst to keep them. But thou shalt not need to seek far, for the sun doth demonstrate them sufficiently unto thee. The sun by his light and heat (which are the *gifts of the Father of corporal light*) produceth all things: so also the best gifts and perfect gifts which are from above, and descend from God the true Father of Light, are the light of wisdom and order of charity. The light of wisdom (which maketh us truly wise and leadeth us to the heavenly Fountain of Wisdom) teacheth us to contemn things corporal and esteem things eternal; it teacheth us: *Not to trust in the uncertainty of riches but in the living God.** It teacheth us not to make this banishment our country, nor to love this pilgrimage, but to endure it. Lastly, it teacheth us to hold this life in patience, which is so full of dangers and temptation, and death in desire, because: *Blessed are the dead that die in our Lord.*† The order of true charity is to love God without end, who is the end of all desires;

* 1 Tim. vi 17.

† Apoc. xiv 13.

and to love other things so far forth as they shall be needful to obtain that happiness. Truly there is not any among the children of men who will proceed so absurdly in the cure of his body as to love a bitter potion better than his health; for he knoweth that the one is the end and the other is but the means to obtain that end. How then cometh it to pass that so many who would be accounted wise, keep no measure in heaping together riches, in following the pleasures of the flesh, and in getting degrees of honour, as if in these things consisted the end of man's desire: but in loving God and in seeking after eternal happiness, they are content with so little, as if it were the means to the end, and not the end of all other things? Truly the reason is because they have the wisdom of this world, and not the wisdom which is from above, descending from the Father of Light. And because their love is not orderly, therefore it is not true love, which cannot be but orderly; for they are full of covetousness, which is not from God, but from the world. Thou, therefore, my soul, whilst thou art a pilgrim from thy country, and among enemies, which oppugn true wisdom and charity, and call subtlety sapience, and covetousness frugality, sigh from the bottom of thy heart to the Father of Light that it would please him to

cause those best gifts and perfect gifts, to wit, the light of true wisdom and the heat of orderly charity, to descend into thy heart; and so being replenished with them, it may run without stumbling in the way of God's commandments, and come to that country where they drink of the fountain of wisdom and live by the pure milk of charity.

CHAPTER IV

AS THE MOON IS SUBJECT TO THE SUN, SO THE
SOUL TRULY JOINED TO GOD IS PURELY
LIGHTED

I COME now to the night season, in which the heaven by the moon and stars maketh us a step to ascend unto God. For so speaketh David: *because I shall see thy heavens, the work of thy fingers: the moon and the stars, which thou hast founded.** If we could see heaven itself, the prophet would not have said (declaring in a manner what before he set down) *The moon and the stars which thou hast founded.* For then, doubtless, we should have an excellent ladder to ascend unto God. We know that there are some who defined the nature of the heavens by the motion of the stars to be a fifth essence, simple, incorruptible, and always circularly moving; and we know that

* Ps. viii 4.

there have been others also who would have heaven to be the element of fire, not moved circularly and in some parts corruptible. But we seek not after opinion: but certain knowledge or doctrine of faith, that we may frame thereby a firm ladder to know God. From the moon and stars which we see, we will therefore erect a ladder with the prophet, as we have already done from the sun, the fountain of corporal light.

The moon hath two properties, which may help us to ascend unto God and to serve him. First, the nearer it cometh to the sun, the lighter it is in the higher part next to heaven, and the darker in the lower part next to earth; and when it is under the sun and joined therewith, then it is wholly light towards heaven and dark towards earth. Again, when it is opposite against the sun, it shineth as full to the inhabitants of the earth, and hath no light in the higher part towards heaven. This property of the moon may teach men how careful they ought to be of their nearness, subjection, and conjunction with God, the true Father of Light. The moon signifieth man, the sun God. When the moon is opposite against the sun, there with her light borrowed from the sun, she only beholdeth the earth, and turneth her back as it were to heaven; therefore, she then appeareth very beautiful

to the inhabitants of the earth; but very deformed to those in heaven. Even so, men when they are far from God (as the prodigal son that departed from his father and went into a far country), then do they abuse the light of reason, which they received from him, to behold the earth only, and are altogether occupied in getting the wealth thereof; and then of the children of this world they are accounted wise and happy; but of the heavenly citizens they are esteemed *poor and blind, and naked*, deformed, and miserable.* Again, when the moon is under the sun or very near it, she then shineth in the higher part, and only beholdeth heaven, turning as it were her back to the earth and vanishing from the eyes of men. Even so, when a sinner beginneth to return unto virtue, and to be truly subjected unto God, the true sun of souls, by humility, and joined unto him by charity, then will he fulfil that which the Apostle adviseth: *Seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting on the right hand of God, and mind the things that are above, not the things that are upon the earth, and then shall he be despised by fond worldlings and accounted a dead man.*† For such a one is indeed dead to the world, and *his life is hid with Christ in God*; and when Christ his life shall appear, then he also shall appear

* Apoc. iii 17.

† Col. iii 1, 2, 3, 4.

*with Christ in glory,** as the same Apostle saith in that place.

And this is the cause (as St Augustine in his Epistle to Januarius hath noted) why the Pasch of our Lord, neither in the Old nor New Law, could be rightly celebrated until the full moon were past, to wit, until the moon which at the full is opposite, beginneth by conversion to return to conjunction with the sun. For God by this celestial planet would show how by the Passion and resurrection of Christ, man, that was opposite unto God by his iniquity, should begin to return unto God, and by the merits of Jesus Christ seek to unite himself unto his grace.†

But thou, my soul, if perhaps by God's grace thou find thyself subjected in true humility unto the Father of Light and joined unto him in fervent charity, do not imitate fools who *are changed as the moon, but emulate wise men which remain as the sun*, as Ecclesiasticus witnesseth.‡ For the moon increaseth quickly and quickly decreaseth. But thou, if thou be wise, abandon not grace once received, depart not from it, for nothing canst thou find better in any place. Neither knowest thou, having lost it, whether thou shalt return to it any more: for he that promised pardon and grace unto the penitent,

* Col. iii 1, 2, 3, 4.

† Ep. 55 ad Januar.

‡ Eccli. xxvii 12.

hath not promised the gift of repentance or a long life unto thee. Therefore, thou mayest without fear turn thy back to the earth and behold thy sun. Rest, delight, and remain in him. Say with the Apostle St Peter: *It is good for us to be here ;** and with the Martyr Ignatius: *It is better for me to live with Christ, than to rule the earth.†* Care not what they think of thee which love the world, for he is not approved whom the world commendeth, but whom God commendeth.‡

CHAPTER V

THE MOON ILLUMINATING THE NIGHT AND
SOMETIME LEAVING US IN DARKNESS,
FIGURETH THE DIVINE GRACE

THE moon hath also another property, which God is accustomed to use towards his elect. For the moon governeth the night, as the sun the day, saith Moses in Genesis,§ and David in the Psalms;|| but the sun shineth all day long; the moon sometimes in the night casteth a great light, sometimes a small, and sometimes none at all. So God, like the sun, always shineth upon the holy angels and blessed souls, which enjoy perpetual

* Matt. xvii 4.

† *Ep. ad Rom.*, No. 6.

‡ 2 Cor. x 18.

§ Gen. i 16.

|| Ps. cxxxv 8, 9.

days (*for there shall be no night there*, saith St John in the Apocalypse^{*}), but, in this night of our pilgrimage and banishment, in which *we walk by faith, and not by sight*,† and attend to holy Scripture *as to a candle shining in a dark place*, as St Peter saith in his last Epistle,‡ God, like the moon, doth sometimes visit and illuminate our hearts; and sometimes leaveth us in the darkness of desolation.

Yet thou oughtest not, my soul, to be too sorrowful, albeit thou enjoyest not the light of consolation; nor rejoice too much, if shortly after thou breathe in the light of comfortable devotion. For God is as the moon and not as the sun in the light of this world. Neither doth he only appear unto us poor and imperfect creatures, sometimes as a moon full of the light of consolation and sometimes without light, leaving us in the dark night of desolation; for the Apostle St Paul, *the vessel of election*§ who was rapt into the third heaven and heard secret words, *which is not lawful for a man to speak*,|| saith sometimes: *I am replenished with consolation, I do exceedingly abound in joy in all our tribulation*;¶ and sometimes he sigheth and lamenteth, saying: *I see another law in my*

* Apoc. xxi 25.

† 2 Pet. i 19.

|| 2 Cor. xii 2, 4.

† 2 Cor. v 7.

§ Acts ix 15.

¶ 2 Cor. vii 4.

*members, repugning to the law of my mind and captivating me in the law of sin that is in my members. Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?** And in his last unto the Corinthians: *We will not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning our tribulation which hath happened in Asia, that we were pressed above measure, above our power, for that it was tedious unto us even to live.†* And thus, as St John Chrysostom noteth,‡ God dealeth with all his saints, to wit, not suffering them to have continual tribulations, nor to enjoy continual consolations, but in an admirable variety of prosperity and adversity to spend, as it were, their lives. Thus much of the moon.

CHAPTER VI

THE ORDER AND HARMONY OF THE STARS
PRESENTETH AN IMAGE OF THE HEAVENLY
HIERARCHY

THE stars also are numbered among the ornaments of heaven of which Ecclesiasticus saith, *the glory of the stars is the beauty of heaven*, but he presently addeth: *Our Lord illuminating the world on high.§* For all the beauty of the stars, sun, and moon proceedeth from God the Father of Light; neither doth

* Rom. vii 23, 24.

‡ Hom. viii in Matt.

† 2 Cor. i 8.

§ Eccli. xliii 10.

the sun by day or moon and stars by night give light, but it is the Lord that dwelleth on high, who by the sun, moon, and stars giveth light to the world. For it is he; who as the prophet Baruch speaketh, *sendeth forth light and it goeth, and hath called it and it obeyeth him with trembling. And the stars have given light in their watches, and rejoiced they were called, and they said, Here we are: and they have shined to him that made them with cheerfulness.** By which words the infinite power of God is signified, who did in a moment produce and cause to work bodies so great and beautiful. *And to shine to him that made them with cheerfulness* is with such readiness to obey their Maker, as if in obeying him they were greatly pleased and delighted. And surely it is a thing much to be marvelled, that the stars, moving so speedily and continually, and some performing their course so slowly, and some so swiftly in their several orbs: yet they always keep such measure and proportion together, that from it ariseth a most sweet and pleasing harmony. Whereof God speaketh in the book of Job when he saith: *Who shall declare the manner of the heavens, and the harmony of heaven who shall make to sleep?*† This is not the harmony of voices or sounds heard with corporal ears, but the harmony of proportion

* Baruch iii 33.

† Job xxxviii 37.

in the motions of the stars, heard only with the ear of the heart. For all the stars of the firmament pass with the like speed about the whole compass of heaven in four and twenty hours; and the seven planets or wandering stars are moved, some swifter and some slower, so that the stars of the firmament seem to bear the plain-song (to speak after the vulgar manner) and the planets to modulate a sweet and continual kind of descant. But these things are above us, and this harmony is heard only by them that are in heaven and understand the reasons of these motions. The stars also keep a just measure always in turning round: and therefore they seem to dance continually in heaven, like honest virgins skilful in that art.

But thou, my soul, ascend a little higher if thou canst, and by the great brightness of the sun, the beauty of the moon, the multitude and variety of the other lights, the admirable harmony of heaven, and delightful dancing of the stars, think what it will be to behold God above heaven, to wit, that sun *that inhabiteth light not accessible*:* to behold the Virgin Queen of Heaven, who being *fair as the moon*,† rejoiceth all the city of God; to behold the choirs and orders of angels, which being more in number and brighter than the stars, adorn the imperial heaven;

* 1 Tim. vi 16.

† Cant. vi 9.

ASCENT OF THE MIND TO GOD

to behold the souls of saints among the companies of angels, as planets among the stars of the firmament. And lastly, to hear the songs of praise, and that eternal Alleluia with concurring voices most sweetly to resound in the streets of that city. Then shall it come to pass that neither the beauty of heaven will seem great unto thee, nor the things below heaven (which are small, short, and of no value) will be rejected and condemned.



THE EIGHTH STEP
*FROM THE CONSIDERATION OF
THE REASONABLE SOUL*

CHAPTER I

THE SOUL IS THE CREATED SPIRIT; GOD IS THE
INCREATED SPIRIT AND CREATOR OF ALL
THINGS

WE have hitherto passed only through corporal things, while we intended from the contemplation of creatures to ascend unto the Creator. And now we find the soul of man, surpassing the dignity of all bodies, to be in the lowest rank of spiritual substances, between whom and God there are no other but the hierarchies and orders of angels.

The human soul carrieth such a resemblance with God the maker thereof, that truly I know no way more easy for a man to ascend unto the knowledge of God than from the consideration of his own soul. And therefore he is inexcusable before God if he know not God, since from the knowledge of his own soul he may by

God's assistance without difficulty attain thereunto.*

First, therefore, the soul of man is a spirit, for so the holy Fathers expound those words of Genesis: *The Lord God formed man of the slime of the earth and breathed into his face the breath of life*;† and that of Tobias: *command my spirit to be received*;‡ and Ecclesiastes: *let the dust return into his earth, and the spirit return to God who gave it*.§ For albeit the word "spirit" agree also to the wind, whereof it is said in the psalm: *the spirit of storms*,|| and in the Gospel: *The spirit breatheth where he will and thou hearest his voice*:¶ yet there is no doubt but that the spirit of storms is a body, which by reason of the exceeding rarity thereof, doth nearer imitate a natural spirit than any other body whatsoever. But the soul of man is a true spirit, not a body; neither is it produced out of matter, but created of God. Whereof among Catholics there is no controversy.

Here then beginneth the excellency of the soul and her resemblance with God. *For God is a Spirit* (as our Saviour plainly saith), *and they that adore him must adore in spirit and verity*.** But although God is

* Rom. i 20.

† Gen. ii 7.

‡ Tob. iii 6.

§ Eccles. xii 7.

|| Ps. cxlviii 8.

¶ John iii 8.

** John iv 24.

a Spirit, and the soul of man is also a spirit: yet God is a Spirit uncreated, the soul a spirit created: whereupon it followeth that there is an infinite difference between that spirit which is the soul and that Spirit which is God. As therefore the soul may rejoice for being a spiritual substance, excelling thereby the heavens and the stars in nobility of nature, so ought she also to be humbled unto God her Maker, because she is made of nothing, and without him, of herself is nothing.

CHAPTER II

THE SOUL IS IMMORTAL; GOD ETERNAL

SECONDLY, the soul of man is a simple spirit and therefore immortal; for it hath nothing within itself that can dissolve it, or cause it to die: but as it hath this privilege above the souls of brute beasts, which die with the body, so it ought also likewise to admire and reverence the excellency of the Creator, who is not only immortal, but also eternal. For there was a time when the soul of man was not, and by the will of God only it took beginning, and may likewise (if God so please) be reduced to nothing, although in itself it hath no cause of corruption. And therefore rightly saith the Apostle of God: *Who only hath immortality* ;*

* 1 Tim. vi 16.

can by no power, chance, or reason be dissolved, because he is life itself and the Fountain of Life.

CHAPTER III

THE SOUL IS ENDOWED WITH REASON; GOD IS
LIGHT AND UNDERSTANDING

THIRDLY, the soul of man hath the light of understanding: for it not only discerneth colours, scents, tastes, sounds, hot, cold, hard, soft, and other such like things which lie open to the senses of the body: but also judgeth of substances and of general and universal notions as well as of particular; neither knoweth it only things present, but also conjectureth of things to come, and mounteth by discourse above the heavens, penetrateth the deeps, searcheth out causes by effects, and from effects runneth back to causes. Lastly, by the light of reason, it ascendeth unto God who *inhabiteth light inaccessible*.^{*} And of this light St John saith in his Gospel: *It was the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world*.[†] And David in the Psalms: *The light of thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us*:[‡] and: *Do not become as horse and mule, which have no understanding*.[§]

* 1 Tim. vi 16.

‡ Ps. iv 7.

† John i 9.

§ Ps. xxxi 9.

There is great dignity of the soul, whereby man is made like to God, and unlike to beasts; and from thence we may and ought to consider the infinite eminency and sublimity of God. For the soul is endued with the light of understanding, but God is Light and Understanding. The soul discourseth from the cause to the effect, and from the effect to the cause, and with great labour getteth knowledge: God seeth all things at once and perfectly together. The soul understandeth things which are, and therefore her knowledge dependeth of things; God by his understanding causeth things to be, and therefore their existence dependeth of his knowledge. The soul in some sort conjectureth of things to come: God seeth always all things to come, as plainly as things past or present. The soul wanteth many things to exercise the gift of understanding, as object, species, phantasy, and the like: God wanteth nothing, for his essence is to him all things.

Lastly, the soul, while it is in the body, cannot see God nor angels or itself or any substance truly, though it be corporal; many things also it knoweth not and is deceived, conjecturing much by opinion, and comprehending little by demonstration. But God knoweth all things, without conjecture or error, for *all things are naked and open*

to his eyes, as the Apostle speaketh in his Epistle to the Hebrews.* If man then esteem his knowledge so much, that the Apostle saith *knowledge puffeth up*,† how ought he to admire the knowledge of God, in comparison whereof all knowledge of man is ignorance!

CHAPTER IV

THE SOUL HATH PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE;
THE HIGHEST LAW IS IN THE MIND OF
GOD

FOURTHLY, there is another kind of knowledge in the soul of man, which consisteth not in speculation but in action. Whereupon so many books of virtues and vices, so many laws, ordinances, institutions, and exercises to attain the knowledge how to live well. By all which an admirable light of reason is discovered to be in man, whereby he far excelleth beasts.

But all these things are nothing in comparison of the law eternal, which liveth in the mind of God, from whence, as from an everflowing fountain, all laws and ordinances have sprung. *For there is one lawmaker and judge, God, saith St James in his Epistle.‡ He is truth, justice, and wisdom, by whom*

* Heb iv 13.

† 1 Cor. viii 1.

‡ Jas. iv 12.

*kings reign, and the makers of laws decree just things.** Thou shalt never, therefore, find out the skill how to live well, until thou be admitted into the school of Christ, *who only is the true Master.†* By his word and example thou shalt learn that *Justice, which aboundeth above the justice of the Scribes and Pharisees,‡* or of the philosophers; the end whereof is charity from a pure heart and a good conscience and a faith not feigned.§

CHAPTER V

THE SOUL OF MAN INVENTETH ARTS; GOD IS
THE FOUNTAIN OF WIT AND WISDOM,
WHICH INVENTETH ALL THINGS

FIFTHLY, the soul of man hath a third kind of knowledge, which consisteth in making things ingeniously. And truly spiders know also how to make their cobwebs, birds their nests, bees their honey, and foxes their holes: but these creatures by instinct of nature do the same things after one and the same manner. But the soul of man by reason and judgement hath invented innumerable arts, by which it governeth and ruleth by force all other living creatures.

Neither can birds escape by flight, fishes by swimming, lions and bears by strength,

* Prov. viii 15.

† Matt. xxiii 8.

‡ Matt. v 20.

§ 1 Tim. i 5.

horses and mules by fierceness, nor stags and goats by swiftness. For even children take birds with snares and birdlime, and fishers with hooks and nets catch fishes. And men by wit and art include and carry lions and bears into iron cages, take wild boars and stags in toils or kill them with javelins, and tame horses and mules with the bridle and make them fit to be ridden upon.

What shall I say of the art of navigation? How great light of wit shined in the soul of man when it taught great ships, being heavily laden, not only to run through the main with oars like feet, but also to fly with sails like wings! What of agriculture? Who will not wonder at man's wit to behold the cornfields, vineyards, orchards, gardens, fishponds, and springs of waters brought to irrigate and moisten them? What of architecture? Who will not admire the palaces, temples, cities, arches, towers, amphitheatres, pillars, and pyramids of stone? I omit the arts of painting and engraving, by which the countenances of men and other things are so lively expressed in colours or marble, that sometimes they are taken for true, and not for painted or engraven. I will say nothing of other arts invented by man either for necessity, profit, or pleasure, for they are so many that they scarcely can be numbered.

Give thanks, therefore, O my soul, to God, that it hath pleased him to make thy nature so far different from the natures of other living creatures; and lift up the eyes of thy mind unto thy said Maker, in whom is the true fountain of that wit and wisdom which created all things. From that fountain did flow all the wit which is derived unto thy nature; and if thou dost admire man's wit, because it hath learned how to tame wild beasts by industry and art, admire God's welcome much more, whom not only all living creatures, but also all things without life serve and obey. And if it seem much to thee, that man hath invented the arts of sailing on the seas, tilling the fields and building houses, much more let it seem to thee that God hath built the heavens, earth, and seas, and all things which are in them. And, lastly, if thou wonder at the lively painting in colours, or engrafting in stone, why dost thou not wonder at the skill of thy Creator, who of clay made a true living man, and of the rib of a man made a true living woman? * Add also that man can do nothing without God, but God doth all things alone without help of any other?

* Gen. ii 7, 21, 22.

CHAPTER VI

COMPARETH THE FREE WILL OF MAN WITH THE
LIBERTY OF GOD

SIXTHLY, man's soul hath free will, in which it is like to God and angels, and chiefly differeth from other creatures. This is a great and admirable excellency.

But the freedom of will in God is so great that the freedom of the soul, being compared thereunto, scarce seemeth a shadow thereof. The freedom of man's will is weak, and prone to choose things evil and hurtful. The liberty of God's will is most strong, and can never fail or be inclined to evil.

For as to die is an infirmity of a mortal body, and not to die an ability of a glorified body, so to sin is an infirmity of free will, and not to sin will be an ability of the same free will, when God shall hereafter in heaven give us that by grace, which he always hath by nature. Our free will also is free indeed potentially to will and not to will, or actually to will and not to will, but it cannot do what it will or not do what it will, even in itself, and much less in others. Hear the Apostle lamenting in his Epistle to the Romans: *Not the good which I will, that do I, but the evil which I will not, that I do.** And which

* Rom. vii 15.

of us all but findeth this true by experience? I would pray with attention to God, and I command my imagination not to wander about and cause me to think of other things while I pray: and yet I cannot keep it in order; but when I least suspect, I find myself deluded by it, and, omitting my prayers, I fall to muse on other matters. I would not be molested with lust, nor angry out of reason, and by free will I command the concupiscible and irascible powers which are in me to obey reason, and not to be seduced by the bodily senses: and yet reason is not obeyed, nor that done which I would, but that which I would not.

But of all other things it is most admirable and miserable that the mind commandeth the body and it presently obeyeth; it commandeth itself and it disobeyeth: *Unde hoc monstrum? Whence is this strange thing?* saith St Augustine. *The mind commandeth the hand to move, and it doth with such speed, that the commandment can hardly be discerned from the execution thereof, and the mind is the mind, and the hand a body! The mind commandeth the mind to be willing, and it is the same thing and yet it doth it not. . . . But it willeth not fully, and therefore it doth not fully command. It is not therefore any strange thing, but an infirmity of the mind, which doth not fully rise, being lifted up by*

*truth and kept down by custom.** But the free will of God is joined with absolute power, as it is written: *He hath done all things whatsoever he would;†* and: *There is none that can resist thy will.‡*

Wherefore, my soul, if thou be wise, do not boast of the force of thy free will until thou come into the freedom of glory of the sons of God,§ where thy heavenly Physician will cure all thy infirmities, and fill thy desire with all good things. And in the meanwhile sigh daily, and say unto God with the prophet: *Be thou my helper, forsake me not.||* And not outwardly and for custom's sake, but with attention and from thy heart, repeat at the least seven times a day: *O God, intend unto my help; Lord, make haste to help me.¶*

CHAPTER VII

THE REASONABLE WILL OF THE SOUL HATH POWER TO DESIRE SPIRITUAL GOOD THINGS; GOD IS HIMSELF THE HIGHEST GOOD, WHICH IS CHARITY

SEVENTHLY, man's soul hath a reasonable will, which not only hath power to desire good things present, particular, and corporal,

* *Confess.*, VIII, c. 9.

† *Ps.* cxiii 11.

§ *Rom.* viii 21.

¶ *Ps.* lxix 2.

‡ *Esth.* xiii 9.

|| *Ps.* xxvi 9.

as beasts do, but also good things absent, universal, and spiritual, which are known by the light of faith or reason, until it come to the highest happiness, which is God. This maketh the soul capable of virtues, and especially of charity, the queen of virtues.

Brute beasts, indeed, have the love of concupiscence, but the love of friendship they know not. But thou, my soul, art by God made capable (the chief of all gifts) whereby God remaineth in thee and thou in him. *For God is charity, and he that abideth in charity abideth in God, and God in him.**

And if the happiness of a created will be so great, what may we think of the happiness wherewith the increated will is fulfilled? Only the will of God is capable of infinite love, wherewith the infinite goodness of God is worthy to the loved. Neither doth his will want virtues, or needeth to be directed by his understanding, for they are all one, as wisdom and charity in God is the same thing.

* 1 John iv 16.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PRESENCE OF THE SOUL IN THE BODY
IS A MIRROR OF THE EXISTENCE OF GOD
IN CREATED THINGS

EIGHTHLY, the soul of man is in the body, but far otherwise than the souls of brute beasts in their bodies. The souls of brute beasts are material, and extended according to their bodies: so that a part of it is in a part of their body, and the whole in their whole body. But the soul of man, because it is an indivisible spirit, is after an admirable manner whole in all, and whole in every part; so that, albeit it fill all the body, yet it occupieth no place in the body: and when the body groweth, the soul groweth not, but beginneth to be where before it was not. And if a member be cut away or withered, the soul is not diminished or withered, but ceaseth to be in that member where before it was, without hurt or mutilation.

This is a true resemblance of God's existence in creatures, for God is an indivisible spirit: and yet he filleth all the world and every part thereof. Neither doth he occupy any place, but is whole in all and whole in every part of the world; and when any creature is produced, God beginneth to be in it, and yet he is not moved. And

when any creature is by chance destroyed, or dieth, God is not destroyed or dieth, but ceaseth to be in it, without local mutation.

Thus far, then, God and the soul agree: but in many things God (as is meet) doth far excel. For the soul, before it can move and govern the body, must become the form of the body, and be so united to it that the soul and body is made one man. But God needeth not become the form or soul of the world: neither of him and the world is one compounded substance made, for his immensity is such that he is everywhere; his indivisible unity such that he is wholly everywhere: and his omnipotency such that he worketh everywhere.

Moreover, although the soul be said to be in all the body, yet it is not properly, but in the parts which have life; and therefore it is not in the humours, in the hair, in the nails, or in dried and dead members. But God is in all things both corporal and spiritual without exception; neither can it be that anything exist, wherein God is not. The soul also is but in her own body, which is narrow and straight, and where all the parts are continued together. But God is in this universality of things, although it be very great and the parts thereof not continued together, but contiguous and adjoining. And if more worlds were made God should

be in them all, for of him it is written: *The heaven and the Heaven of Heavens do not contain thee.** And albeit new heavens and earths were multiplied without end, God should fill them all, for no place can be where he should not be.

CHAPTER IX

THE SOUL IS IN SOME SENSE AN IMAGE OF THE
MOST HOLY TRINITY

NINTHLY, the soul of man (beside those things which are said) hath also in it an obscure image of the Blessed Trinity, because it hath a power to remember, to understand, and to love; and also for that the mind doth by the understanding form a word; and from the mind and the word proceedeth love: for that which is known by the mind and represented by the word as good is forthwith by the will loved and desired.

But God the Father did after a more high and divine manner beget God the Word, and God the Father and God the Word breathed out God the Holy Ghost, the living fountain of all chaste love.

And therefore the mystery of the Trinity doth surpass all natural knowledge; neither can a learned philosopher attain thereunto

* 2 Paralip. vi 18.

without supernatural light. For the soul of man produceth a word and a love which are not substances, but accidents, and therefore no persons. But God the Father did beget the Word consubstantial to himself, and the Father and the Word breathed out the Holy Ghost consubstantial likewise to them both. Therefore the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are truly three persons. The soul of man also produceth a word which continueth not long, and the will produceth a love which lasteth not long, but God the Father did beget the Word eternal, and the Father and the Word did breathe out the Holy Ghost eternal. For God cannot be without his Word and Spirit. Furthermore, the soul of man by one word representeth but one thing; and therefore it multiplieth the words not only of the mind, but also of the mouth. The will of man likewise must produce many acts of love, if it will love many things; but God with one Word speaketh all truth, and with one act of love loveth all good things.

CHAPTER X

THE SOUL BESTOWETH NATURAL THINGS ON
THE BODY; GOD BESTOWETH HEAVENLY
GIFTS ON THE SOUL

TENTHLY and lastly, the soul of man, while it is in the body, is not seen, heard, moved,

nor scarce conceived to be there; and yet from it all good things are derived to the body, as sense, motion, speech, subsistence, beauty, strength, and the like. For how could a man see, hear, speak, walk, subsist, and be strong, fair, and amiable, unless his soul were in him? And why doth he not after he is dead see, hear, speak, and move, but because his soul is departed, from whence these benefits proceeded?

Even so, thy God, O my soul, while he liveth in thee by his grace, maketh thee to see what faith showeth thee, and to hear what he speaketh in thee, that thou mayest walk in the way of the commandments towards the heavenly Jerusalem, and speak in prayer to God and in good exhortation to thy neighbour, and subsist persevering in good works, and be strong in battle against thy invisible enemies, and thereby become beautiful in the eyes of the invisible God and his angels.

But take heed lest God's grace departing from thee, which is the life of thy soul, thou fall into the losses of the first death, and from it be carried to the second death, from whence there is no resurrection.*

Oh that thy God would open the eyes of thy mind that thou mightst behold the beauty of a soul, that is united to him in

* Apoc. xx 5, 6, 14.

charity! What place he prepareth for it! What joys he promiseth it! How lovingly he looketh on it! And with what longing it is expected by the angels and blessed souls! Then wouldst thou not endure that so great beauty should be blemished with the least spot, and if it should so happen, thou wouldst endeavour to wash it away with floods of tears. For so did St Francis, as St Bonaventura reporteth, who although he could not follow the immaculate Lamb without some spot,* endeavoured notwithstanding to purge and cleanse his soul with daily showers of tears from all spots of offences whatsoever.† Again, if thy God would open thy inward eyes, that thou mightst see the deformity of a sinful soul, how it stinketh like a rotten carcass, and how both God and his angels refuse to look thereon, although, perhaps, it dwell in a beautiful body very pleasing to the eyes of men, surely thou wouldst be so affrighted that by no means thou wouldst become such a one, nor long continue in such estate.

* Apoc. xiv 4.

† *Vita S Franc.*, c. 5, No. 7.



THE NINTH STEP
*FROM THE CONSIDERATION OF
ANGELS*

CHAPTER I

AN ANGEL IS ALTOGETHER A PERFECT SPIRIT
AND A CREATED; GOD IS INCREATED AND
MOST PERFECT

WE are come to the highest step of ascension unto God from created substances. For if we speak only of natural perfection, there is no created substance higher than that of angels. First, therefore, we will consider angels according to their excellency of nature; secondly, according to their sublimity of grace; and lastly, according to the offices which they execute. For it is not our meaning to enter into a full disputation about angels, but only to touch such things as may help us to elevate our minds to God.

If an angel, then, be compared unto man's reasonable soul, it may fitly be called a perfect soul, even as the soul may be called an imperfect angel. For so of man spake the prophet by reason of his soul, when he

said: *Thou hast minished him a little less than angels.** An angel is a perfect spiritual substance; the soul an imperfect spiritual substance because it is the body's form and but one part of man. Therefore an angel is all spirit; man partly spirit and partly flesh, or partly an angel and partly a beast; as if one should say, an angel is all of gold; man partly of gold and partly of clay. The prophet then said truly: Man is minished little less than angels. And it is also true that the soul of man, because it is a part of man, is little less than an angel. Whereupon it followeth that an angel is more like to God than a man or his soul, for God is a Spirit, and not a body or form of a body.

And yet, notwithstanding this resemblance of an angel unto God, God is a Spirit infinitely excelling the dignity of an angel: for God is a Spirit uncreated, eternal, immense, almighty, only good, only wise, only high.

If then, my soul, thou wilt confess that thou dost with reason admire the nature of angels, how much more oughtst thou to admire and reverence the nature of God, who without all comparison excelleth them !

* Ps. viii 6.

CHAPTER II

OF THE UNDERSTANDING AND KNOWLEDGE OF
ANGELS

NEITHER in nature nor substance only may an angel be called a perfect man, and man an imperfect angel; but also in knowledge and understanding. For man, because he useth the ministry of his senses and discourseth from effects to causes, and from causes to effects, understandeth with labour, and by degrees attaineth unto knowledge; whereupon he oftentimes doubteth, oftentimes is deceived, and seldom findeth out the truth. But an angel beholdeth at once the effects and causes together, seeth the substance with the accidents, and spiritual things with corporal.

Man, therefore, while he is a pilgrim on earth, in understanding is not a little less, but much less than angels. So that albeit he excel in wit and in the study of philosophy, yet in comparison of an angel he may truly be accounted a child or sucking infant.

Not untruly, therefore, spake the prophet of us mortal men: *Out of the mouths of infants and sucklings thou hast perfected praise.** Hear what the most wise Solomon judged of our

* Ps. viii 3.

wisdom, wherewith we are so puffed up: *All things are hard; man cannot explicate them in word.** And again: *God hath delivered the world to their disputation, that man cannot find the work, which God hath wrought from the beginning to the end.*† If all things then are hard, and such as man cannot explicate, and if man understand nothing in this visible world, from the first creature to the last, I say nothing so perfectly as that he is able to explicate the nature, properties, accidents, and secret virtues thereof; into what errors shall he fall, if he undertake to search out the things which are above heaven.

Wherefore, if thou be wise, my soul, follow the knowledge of salvation and wisdom of saints, which consisteth in fearing God and keeping his commandments: delight more in prayer than in disputation, and in edifying charity than in proud knowledge.‡ For that is the way which leadeth unto life eternal, where we little ones shall be made equal with angels, which always see the face of their Father which is in heaven.§

* Eccles. i 8.

† Eccles. iii 11.

‡ 1 Cor. viii 1.

§ Luke xx 36; Matt. xviii 3, 10.

CHAPTER III

THE DOMINION OF THE ANGELS OVER BODIES;
AND THE ALL-POWERFUL CREATOR

THERE is also a third thing, wherein man's soul is not a little less, but much less than angels, to wit, in the power and command over bodies. For man's soul moveth the body by commandment of the will, but other bodies it cannot so move; and it moveth the body by progressive motion upon the earth, but cannot suspend it upon the water, elevate it above the air, or carry it whither it will. But angels only by force of spirit and commandment of will elevate heavy bodies and carry them whither they list. So an angel took up Habacuc, and in a very short time carried him to Babylon to bring Daniel his dinner, and recarried him to Palestine.*

A man also cannot fight in spirit only with his enemies, but with his hands and weapons; but an angel by power of spirit, without hands or weapons, can encounter and overcome a whole army of men. So one angel slew at once a hundred fourscore and five thousand Assyrians.†

And if angels can do these things, what can the Lord and Maker of angels do? He

* Dan. xiv 32 *sqq.*

† 4 Kings xix 35.

truly made all things of nothing, and can reduce all things to nothing.

Man's soul, moreover, can, by the art of painting, with industry and labour make the image of a man so lively that it may seem to live and breathe; but an angel can without labour of hands or instruments, almost in a moment of time, assume in such sort a body elementary that wise men will judge it to be the true body of a man, because it can walk, speak, eat, drink, be touched, handled, and washed. So Abraham prepared meat for the angels and washed their feet;* for, as the Apostle explaineth: he received angels to harbour thinking they had been men.† The which also happened to his nephew Lot, when he received two angels as strangers into his house.‡ The angel Raphael in like manner remained with young Tobias many days, walking, speaking, eating, and drinking, as if he had been a man indeed; yet notwithstanding being after to depart, he said: *I seemed indeed to eat with you, and to drink, but I use an invisible meat and drink, and suddenly he vanished from their sight.*§

Surely it is admirable, and proceedeth from great power, so to frame a body on the sudden as that it may seem to differ in nothing from

* Gen. xviii 2 sqq.

† Heb. xiii 2.

‡ Gen. xix 1 sqq.

§ Tob. xii 19, 21.

the living body of a man, and again at pleasure, on the sudden, so to dissolve the same body that nothing thereof remain. If, then, the power of angels be so great, how great is the power of the Maker of angels who gave them that power! Truly as the knowledge of angels and men, being compared with the knowledge of God, is ignorance; and as the justice of angels and men, being compared with the justice of God, is injustice; so all the power of angels and men, being compared with the power of God, is infirmity. Therefore it is truly said: *Our God only wise,* only good,† and only mighty.‡*

CHAPTER IV

OF THE PLACE AND MOTION OF ANGELS AND THE OMNIPRESENCE OF GOD

LASTLY, if we consider the place of angels and of men, we shall find man's soul in that respect also, *Not a little less, but much lessened under the angels.*§ (I willingly use that word which the Apostle useth.) For God hath appointed a place on earth for the soul of man, and in heaven, to wit, in his palace, a place for angels. *For the Heaven of Heavens is to our Lord: but the earth he hath given to the children of men.*||

* Rom. xvi 27.

† Luke xviii 19.

‡ 1 Tim. vi 15. § Heb. ii 7. || Ps. cxiii 24.

Whereupon our Lord in St Matthew calleth them *the angels of heaven*,* and in St Luke he saith: *There shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance*, and a little after: *There shall be joy before the angels of God upon one sinner that doth penance*.† God also hath so tied the soul to the body that it cannot without it remove from place to place; but angels are not tied to any body, but have power given them to pass from heaven to earth, and from earth to heaven or whithersoever they will, with very great speed. So that angels, being next unto God in dignity of nature, do also, in some sort, by their celerity imitate his ubiquity. For God is everywhere by immensity of nature, and therefore needeth no change of place: angels by swiftness of motion pass so speedily from place to place, and so exhibit their presence in every place, that they seem after a sort to be everywhere.

But, my soul, if thou wilt hear the Lord of angels, there is no cause why thou shouldst envy that angels have so high a place and so tireless a motion; for not only thou, my soul, when thou art loosed from the body, shalt be equal unto angels, but when thou shalt return unto thy body, which *Christ will configure to the body of his glory*,‡ with that

* Matt. xxiv 36.

† Luke xv 7, 10.

‡ Phil. iii 21.

body shalt thou possess heaven as thine own house, and it being made spiritual,* shall without labour or weariness be presently there, wheresoever thou (the soul) shalt will and command it. Thy Lord doth not deceive thee, who saith in his Gospel: *In my Father's house there be many mansions; and: I go and prepare you a place; and: If I go and prepare you a place, I come again, and will take you to myself, that where I am, you also may be.*† *Father, I will that where I am, they also may be with me, and that they may see my glory which thou hast given me.*‡ But thou art not ignorant where Christ is, and what body he hath. For thou dost confess every day, and say: *On the third day he rose again from the dead, he ascended into heaven.*§ Thou knowest also that his body after the resurrection did sometimes enter in among his Disciples, the doors being shut;|| and departed from them, not walking but vanishing, that is, he transferred his body from them so speedily as if it had been a spirit and not a body.¶ But if thou seek after this glory, thou must first configure thy body to the body of the humiliation of Christ, and then Christ will configure thy body to the body of his glory:** *For Christ suffered for us,*

* 1 Cor. xv 44.

† John xiv 2, 3.

‡ John xvii 24.

§ Symb. Apost.

|| John xx 19.

¶ Luke xxiv 31.

** Phil. iii 21.

*leaving us an example, that we may follow his steps,** saith St Peter the Apostle. And what are his steps? *Who,* saith he, *did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth, who when he was reviled, did not revile, when he suffered, he threatened not.** There are two steps of Christ, which if thou tread not, thou shalt lose thy way to heaven: Firstly, do not, but suffer evil; secondly, do good, and here expect no good. Or, which is the sum of all, love thy neighbour for God's sake, not for reward of man, and for friendship, not for lust.

CHAPTER V

WHAT SORT OF GRACE BE GIVEN TO ANGELS,
AND WHAT TO MEN

LET us now come to the dignity of angels according to grace. Truly in this also man is lessened more than a little less than angels. For God so created angels in the beginning that at the same instant he made their nature and infused in them grace, as St Augustine witnesseth in his books of the City of God.† And then so soon as by the first conversion of their minds to God they adhered to him by love, the reprobate angels falling, they were crowned with beatitude and glory.

* 1 Pet. ii 21-23.

† *De Civ. Dei*, c. 9, No. 2.

Therefore their pilgrimage was very short, but their mansion in heaven eternal: if yet that short space, which passed between their creation and beatitude, may be called a pilgrimage. But we in our creation received grace with our nature in our first parent and not in ourselves; therefore by his fall we all fell. *In whom*, as the Apostle speaketh, *all sinned*.^{*} For although by the mediator of God and man, Christ Jesus, we are reconciled to God,[†] yet we are condemned to continual banishment; and while we are in the body we are pilgrims from our Lord, *For we walk by faith and not by sight*; [‡] and it much afflicteth pious men and such as sigh after heaven, that we are here conversant among our cruel enemies, where there is danger, lest being circumvented and taken by them we be at length excluded from the possession of our most sweet country. Hence proceeded these words: *Woe is me that my sojourning is prolonged. I have dwelt with the inhabitants of Cedar; my soul hath been long a sojourner*.[§]

But although in this we are less than angels, yet God's mercy doth greatly comfort us; for that it hath pleased him of our kind to exalt Christ and his blessed Mother above all the angels of heaven. Many men likewise,

* Rom. v 12.

‡ 2 Cor. v 7.

† 1 Tim. ii 5.

§ Ps. cxix 5.

being inferior to angels in the gifts of Nature, have surmounted some of them in the gifts of grace, and equalled the highest.

Truly St John Chrysostom, expounding the Epistle to the Romans, doubteth not to place the chief Apostles Peter and Paul where the seraphims do fly and glorify God, which also is a pious belief of St John Baptist and others.

Add, moreover, that as the good angels after their first merit entered into glory, so the evil angels after their first sin were condemned to perpetual punishment. Men ought not, therefore, to complain of a longer space, since they may therein often amend, and by repentance procure pardon for their offences.

CHAPTER VI

IN WHICH THE OFFICES OF THE ANGELS ARE
CONSIDERED

IT now remaineth that we speak somewhat of the offices of angels. Angels have five offices.

The first is always with hymns and songs to praise their Maker. And that we may understand how much God esteemeth this ministry, we must consider that the highest angels are appointed for this office; who being, as it were, the first singers in that

choir, all the other orders of angels follow with incredible exultation.

Hear what the prophet Isaias saith: *I saw the Lord sitting upon a high throne and elevated, and those things that were under him filled the temple. Seraphims stood upon the same, six wings to one and six wings to the other: with two they covered his face, and with two they covered his feet, and with two they flew. And they cried one to another, and said: Holy, Holy, Holy, the Lord God of Hosts, all the earth is full of his glory.** Here thou hearest the name Seraphim, which are the chief of the highest order. Thou seest them cover his face and feet in sign of reverence, as if they durst not behold his face or touch his bare feet; thou seest they fly continually while they sing, which signifieth their desire to approach still nearer unto God, which two things are needful for those who desire to please God, that while they sing his praises, they love him with reverence and reverence him with love. This the prophet David declared, saying: *Serve the Lord in fear and rejoice to him with trembling.†*

From hence thou mayest learn, my soul, with what veneration God is to be served, since the chief angels in heaven, which always behold his face, dare not (notwithstanding their high estate and long familiarity) but

* Isa. vi 1-3.

† Ps. ii 11.

reverently fear him, while they praise him. And what wilt thou, Dust and Ashes, answer at the Day of Judgement, when thou shalt be reprehended for thy drowsiness and distractions in a work so divine that thou wast not worthy to be employed therein? Learn, therefore, from henceforth, being taught by so great an example, to praise thy God with fear, reverence, attention, vigilance, and love.

Another office of angels is to offer up the prayers of men to God, and to commend them also by their suffrage; for so speaketh the angel Raphael in the book of Tobias: *When thou didst pray with tears, and didst bury the dead, and left thy dinner, I offered thy prayer to the Lord* ;* and in the Apocalypse John saw an angel standing before the altar with a golden censer: *And there were, saith he, given to him many incenses, that he should give of the prayers of all saints upon the altar of gold, which is before the throne of God*.†

And in this truly the great mercy of our God doth also appear, for he was not content, first by his prophets and after by his Son and his Apostles, to exhort us to pray, but also promised to give whatsoever we should ask: *Ask, saith he, and it shall be given you* ;‡ and in another place: *If you shall ask my Father*

* Tob. xii 12.

† Apoc. viii 3.

‡ Luke xi 9.

*anything in my name he will give it to you.** And beside this promise, he also added a reward to those that ask: *But thou, saith he, when thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret will repay thee,†* to wit, a reward beside the things which thou didst ask: for so our Lord speaketh in that place of prayer and almsdeeds, saying: *Thy Father which seeth in secret will repay thee.‡*

Neither is God content with this demonstration of fatherly love, but hath appointed the angels as masters of requests to take charge of the prayers and petitions of the poor, and to present and read them in his sight that no one of their petitions may be forgotten. What prince in the world did ever promise rewards to those that came to demand of him mercy or justice? And yet those which come to the princes of the world are men, and the princes themselves also are men made of the same mould and subject to the same almighty God. But albeit it may seem much to reward those that ask, yet ought it not seem much to give them free access to appoint faithful masters of requests to keep their petitions, and to offer them up and solicit their speedy despatch.

* John xvi 23.

† Matt. vi 6.

‡ Matt. vi 4, 18.

The third office of angels is to be sent as ambassadors to denounce such things as God will have denounced, especially concerning our redemption and salvation. So speaketh the Apostle to the Hebrews: *Are not all (the angels) ministering spirits, sent to minister for them which shall receive the inheritance of salvation?**

We read also in many places of the Old Testament how angels appeared to the patriarchs and prophets,† and manifested to them such things as God would have manifested. We find likewise in the New Testament that the angel Gabriel was sent as an ambassador from God to Zachary and to the Virgin Mother of God.‡ Angels also were sent to the shepherds,§ to St Joseph;|| and after the resurrection of our Lord to the women that stayed at the sepulchre;¶ and after the Ascension to all the disciples.**

But if any ask, why God, who is everywhere and can easily by himself speak in the hearts of men, sendeth notwithstanding his angels? I answer, because men may

* Heb. i 14.

† Gen. xviii 2 *sqq.*, xix 1 *sqq.*, xxii 1; Dan. ix 21 *sqq.*, xiv 32 *sqq.*

‡ Luke i 11 *sqq.*, i 26 *sqq.*

§ Luke ii 9 *sqq.*

|| Matt. i 20 *sqq.*, ii 13, 19.

¶ Matt. xxviii 2 *sqq.*; John xx 12 *sqq.*

** Acts i 10, 11.

understand that God regardeth their affairs, and that all things are governed and ordered by him. For otherwise they might persuade themselves that God's inspirations did proceed from their own discourse and counsel. But when they see or hear that angels are sent by God, and the things which the angels foretold, to come so truly to pass, they cannot doubt but that God foreseeth man's affairs, and doth chiefly direct and dispose such things as appertain to the salvation of his elect.

The fourth office of angels is to protect men both in particular and in general. For it pleased the mercy of God to commend unto his strongest servants the custody of the weaker, and to appoint them as tutors over children, guardians over infants, patrons over clients, shepherds over sheep, physicians over sick folks, defenders over orphans and such as cannot defend themselves but under the wings of the more mighty.

Of the protection of particular men David witnesseth: *He hath given his angels charge of thee, that they may keep thee in all thy ways.** And Christ himself is also a faithful witness hereof: *See (saith he) that you despise not one of these little ones, for I say to you, that their angels in heaven always do see the face of my Father which is in heaven.†* Touching their

* Ps. xc ii.

† Matt. xviii 10.

protection also of provinces and kingdoms, Daniel witnesseth: * who calleth the guardian angel of the kingdom of Persia, the king of Persia, and the guardian angel of the kingdom of Greece, the king of Greece, and the guardian angel of the children of Israel he calleth by his name Michael. St John likewise in the Apocalypse writeth of the angels, guardians of churches, and maketh mention of Ephesus, of Smyrna, and of others. †

Therefore in every kingdom there are two kings, the one a visible man, the other an invisible angel; and in the universal Catholic Church there are the chief Pastors appointed under Christ our Lord, the one a visible man, the other an invisible angel, which we believe to be St Michael the Archangel. For as the synagogue of the Jews in times past, so now the Church of the Christians doth reverence him for her patron.

Dost thou not see, my soul, how careful that majesty (who needeth nothing of ours) is of us his poor servants? What could he do more to manifest his great love than he hath done? He hath loaded us with benefits, to make us to stay willingly with him; he hath guarded us with a watch, that we should not fly from him; and he hath appointed over us protectors, lest we should be carried

* Dan. x 5 *sqq.*

† Apoc. ii, iii.

from him. What would he do, if we were his treasure, as indeed he is our only treasure?

Therefore, my soul, yield at last to his love, and being overcome therewith, mancipate and give thyself wholly by an irrevocable vow unto his service. Let not things which are seen move thee, but think of and sigh after the things thou seest not: *For the things that be seen are temporal: but those that be not seen are eternal.**

The fifth and last office of angels is to be as armed captains or soldiers *to work revenge upon nations and correction among the people.†* They were angels which burned the infamous cities with fire and brimstone;‡ which killed the first begotten throughout all Egypt;§ which at one assault destroyed many thousand Assyrians;|| and they shall be angels which, at the Day of Judgement, *shall separate the evil from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire.¶*

Let good men, therefore, love the holy angels as their countrymen: and let wicked men dread their power, which are the executioners of Almighty God's wrath, from whose hands none can deliver them.

* 2 Cor. iv 18.

‡ Gen. xix 13 *sqq.*

|| 4 Kings xix 35.

† Ps. cxlix 7.

§ Exod. xii 12 *sqq.*

¶ Matt. xiii 49, 50.



THE TENTH STEP

FROM THE CONSIDERATION OF GOD'S ESSENCE, BY THE SIMI- LITUDE OF A CORPORAL QUAN- TITY

CHAPTER I

A GENERAL CONSIDERATION OF THE GREATNESS
OF GOD FROM THE FOUR DIMENSIONS OF
CORPORAL THINGS

WE have ascended by created substances as high as we can: and yet we are not come to know God so perfectly, as by speculation even in this vale of tears he may be known. It remaineth, then, that we consider, if by the dimensions of a corporal quantity, which we know, we may ascend unto the breadth, length, height, and depth of God's invisible essence. For among creatures those are said to be great which have found great dimensions. And God in the Psalms, and in many other places, is said to be great,* and his greatness without end.† Truly St Bernard, a man excelling in

* Deut. x 17; Tob. xiii 1; Ps. xciv 3, xcv 4, cxlvi 5, etc.

† Ps. cxliv 3.

contemplation, in his books of Consideration which he writ to Pope Eugenius, framed from these dimensions certain steps to know God. Yet was he not the first inventor of a ladder of this kind, but he learned this manner of ascension from the Apostle who was rapt into the Third Heaven.* For so speaketh the Apostle in his Epistle to the Ephesians: *That you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth.*†

For if anyone consider attentively, he shall find indeed that there is nothing without God sound and substantial: but all is small, short, base, vain, and superficial. But in God his immensity is true breadth, his eternity is true length, his omnipotency is true height, and his incomprehensibility is true depth.

But for him that desireth to ascend, and to find what he seeketh, it is not enough to consider these things lightly: but he must comprehend: *That you may be able*, saith the Apostle, *to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth.* He surely doth comprehend who considereth attentively, and is so fully persuaded by the truth, that selling all he hath, he maketh haste to buy the treasure he hath found:‡

* 2 Cor. xii 2, 4.

† Eph. iii 15.

‡ Matt. xiii 44, 46.

and the Apostle added, *with all the saints*, because the saints only comprehend these things; or for that none comprehendeth them as he ought unless he become a saint.

Neither doth St Augustine contradict what we have said, who in his Epistle to Honoratus writeth, that the Apostle describeth the Cross of Christ by the breadth, length, height, and depth thereof:* the breadth of the Cross was where his hands were nailed; the length to which his body cleaved; the height where his title was written; and the depth was fastened and hid in the earth. I say St Augustine doth not contradict our meaning, but rather much confirm it: for the Cross of Christ is the way to obtain true breadth, length, height, and depth. For although to the eyes of men the Cross seem small, short, base, and of no depth, yet the arms thereof have been extended from east to west and from north to south—that is, the glory thereof hath reached to the highest heaven, which, like a key, it hath opened for the elect; and hath pierced to the lowest hell, which from the same elect it hath shut for ever.

* *Ep.* CXL, c. 26, No. 64.

CHAPTER II

THE BROADNESS OF THE ESSENCE OF GOD IS
HIS IMMEASURABLE GOODNESS

LET us begin from the essence, and then pass on to the attributes.

The essence of God may many ways be said most broad. First in itself, because it is truly infinite, and comprehendeth all the perfections of creatures, which are, or may be, without end. For whatsoever is, shall be, or may be, is without doubt contained in God in a most eminent manner. Creatures, therefore, are good with an addition, as a good man, a good horse, a good house, a good garment, and the like: but God is all good. For when Moses said: *Show me thy glory*, God answered: *I will show thee all good*.*

If one had a thing at home that contained all the objects of the senses in the highest perfection, so that he should never need to go abroad, because he had at home as many delights in that one thing as any sensual man could desire, should not that thing be very precious? And if, moreover, that thing contained in itself such abundant wealth of all sorts as any covetous man could wish, were it not the more precious? And again, if that thing should bring as much honour

* Exod. xxxiii 18, 19.

and dignity to the possessor thereof as any ambitious man could imagine, would it not now seem invaluable? And further, if that thing sufficed to satisfy not only the desires of man, but also of angels (who exceed men in desires as they excel them in knowledge), what wouldst thou say? And yet notwithstanding, should the goodness of that thing be far inferior to the goodness of God, which is so great that it sufficeth to satisfy the infinite desire, or rather infinite capacity of God?

Oh the admirable broadness of the perfection of the essence of God, which embraceth so immense goodness that it wholly sufficeth for his infinite capacity, for God never goeth out of himself, because he hath all good things within himself, and before the world was made he was as rich and as happy as he was afterward: for nothing was made by him but was from everlasting after a most eminent manner in him.

Dost thou understand, my soul, what happiness thou shalt enjoy in heaven, if thou love God on earth? And what happiness thou shalt lose if thou love him not? For then God will give himself, to wit, all good to those that love him, when he shall say: *Good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord.**

* Matt. xxv 21.

CHAPTER III

THE BROADNESS OF THE DIVINE ESSENCE IS
THE IMMENSITY OF GOD, WHO FILLETH
ALL THINGS

GOD also is immense because he filleth all creatures: *I fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord.** And if there were more worlds he would fill them all. *If I shall ascend into heaven, saith David, thou art there, if I descend into hell, thou art present.*† I add also, if I shall go above heaven, or under heaven, or out of heaven, I shall not be alone, because thou art there; neither can I be anywhere but in thee and by thee, which carriest all things by the word of thy power.‡ Moreover, God by his immensity not only filleth all bodies, but also all spirits; for how else could he search the heart§ unless he were in it? And how could he hear the prayers of the heart|| unless he gave ear to them? And how could the prophet say: *I will hear what our Lord God will speak in me,*¶ unless God did put his mouth to the ears of the heart? Happy, therefore, is that soul which loveth God, where God dwelleth: *For he that abideth in charity, abideth in God and God in him.***

* Jer. xxiii 24.

‡ Heb. i 3.

|| Ps. xxvi 8, cxviii 145.

** 1 John iv 16.

† Ps. cxxxviii 8.

§ Ps. vii 10.

¶ Ps. lxxxiv 9.

Neither doth God fill all things with his presence only, but also with his glory. For the seraphims cry: *That the earth is full of his glory*;^{*} and David addeth: *O Lord, our Lord, how marvellous is thy name in the whole earth! Because thy magnificence is elevated above the heavens*,[†] as if he should say: thy name, fame, and glory hath not only filled all the earth with admiration, but also hath ascended and is elevated above the heavens. Ecclesiasticus saith likewise: *Full of the glory of the Lord is his work*;[‡] for there is no creature in heaven or on earth but continually praiseth God. For which cause David in the Psalms,[§] and the three children in Daniel,^{||} do invite all creatures to praise and magnify their Maker, albeit they were not ignorant that many creatures be of such a nature that they could not hear what they said; but because they knew that all God's works were good, and with their beauty therefore praised their Maker, they rejoiced in them, and exhorted them to do as they did.

And truly whosoever hath inward eyes may see that all God's works are as censers sending up an odour of the sweetness of his glory; and whoso hath inward ears may

* Isa. vi 3.

‡ Eccli. xlii 16.

|| Dan. iii 51 *sqq.*

† Ps. viii 2.

§ Ps. cxlviii 1 *sqq.*

hear them (as it were a concert of all kind of musical instruments) praising God and saying : *He made us and not we ourselves.** For although there are of the wicked which curse and blaspheme the name of God, yet they also are enforced even against their wills to praise God, as the work doth the workman; because in them likewise God's power doth marvellously appear whereby he made them, his goodness whereby he preserveth them, his mercy whereby he expecteth and inviteth them to repentance, and his justice whereby he condemneth them to punishment. There are many truly in the world which hear not these voices of creatures, albeit they cry without ceasing; but there are innumerable angels and holy men which hear them, and are delighted therewith; and they also with hymns and song continually praise their Maker. But to proceed.

CHAPTER IV

THE LENGTH OF THE DIVINE ESSENCE IS HIS
ETERNITY

THE length of God's essence is his eternity, which neither hath beginning of duration nor ever shall have end, but is always the same without any change. *Thou art*, saith David, *the self-same, and thy years shall not*

* Ps. xcix 3.

fail.^{*} Tobias also,[†] and after him the Apostle calleth God *the King of worlds*,[‡] because he only was before all worlds and is not subject to worlds, but ruleth and governeth them. Other things have beginning and end and never continue in the same state; or else they have beginning without end or change of substance; yet if their Maker please, they may cease to be. Eternity, therefore, is proper to God only; nor was there ever any prince so proud, that among his many other titles durst arrogate to himself the title of eternal, except, perhaps, in another sense; as Constantius who was called eternal Emperor, because he was not Emperor for a certain time, but for terms of life.

But thou, my soul, mayest be numbered among both kinds of creatures, for thou hast a body which began to be when it was conceived and born; and by degrees it grew to that stature which God appointed: then it began to decrease, and shortly by death it shall cease to be. Therefore it never wholly continueth in the same state, but is every hour subject to change. Of thy body the prophet spake this sentence, resembling it to hay: *In the morning as an herb he shall pass; in the morning he shall flourish and pass;*

^{*} Ps. ci 28.

[†] Tob. xiii 6.

[‡] 1 Tim. i 17.

*in the evening he shall fall, be hardened, and withered.** For in the morning, to wit, in childhood, man's body flourisheth like an herb, and soon after followeth youth; in the noontide of youth it flourisheth, and soon after followeth old age; in the evening of old age it falleth by death, and in the grave it is hardened, withered, and turned to dust.

Behold, therefore, O my soul, how far thy body is from eternity: but thou wast created in time, whereas before thou wast nothing, and therein art far unlike thy eternal Creator: but being created, thy duration is endless, wherein thou dost resemble thy Creator. And because while thou art in the body thou changest often from vice to virtue and from virtue to vice, and according to the state in which thou shalt be found at thy departure from the body thou shalt be judged either to reign for ever with God, or for ever to be tormented with the devil, therefore thou oughtst to have a very great care to eschew vice and to follow virtue. Take heed, then, lest thou be seduced by the allurements of thy flesh to the everlasting perdition both of thyself and it: but rather crucify it *with the vices and concupiscences thereof,*† that thou mayest hereafter live eternally, and thy flesh may rise in

* Ps. lxxxix 6.

† Gal. v 24.

glory, and in glory remain with thee for all eternity.

But although the holy angels and souls of saints are to be partakers of eternity in that high and happy union with God, by his beatifying vision and love, which union shall continue for ever without change, yet may they alter and change their thoughts, affections, and places after divers manners; therefore they shall always reverently admire God's eternity above them, in whom there can be no change of thought, affection, or place: for he wanteth nothing, but hath all things present, which in eternity of time he might by divers changings have procured. Therefore eternity is a length without end, no less proper to God than the breadth of his immensity.

CHAPTER V

THE HEIGHT OF GOD SIGNIFIETH THE NOBILITY
OF THE DIVINE NATURE, WHICH IS THE
FIRST EFFECTIVE AND MOST HIGH CAUSE
AND THE FINAL EXAMPLE OF ALL THINGS

It followeth, then, that we consider the height of God, of whom it is said: *Thou only the highest.** For God is most high in excellency of nature. Other things are the more high and excellent, the more pure they are and

* Ps. lxxxii 19.

more free from matter. This is evident first in corporal things. For the water is higher than the earth because it is more pure, and for the same cause the air is higher than the water, and the fire than the air, and the heaven than the fire.

The like also we find in spiritual things, for the understanding is higher than the sense because the sense hath a corporal organ, which the understanding needeth not; likewise the understanding of angels is higher than man's because man's understanding needeth the help of imagination and phantasy, which angels need not: and among angels they are the highest which understand most by fewest forms.

God, therefore, who is a pure act, needeth neither organ, nor imagination, nor form, for the presence of any object without himself, for his essence is to him all things: neither can he have anything which he hath not always actually had: and to have always actually is always to be a pure and simple act: therefore the nature of God is most high and which cannot by any means have an equal. For which cause he who said: *I will be like to the highest*, was suddenly cast down from heaven into the lowest hell, as Isaias doth describe.* And Christ our

* Isa. xiv 14.

Lord saith of him: *I saw Satan as a lightning fall from heaven.**

God also is most high, for that he is the first and highest efficient, exemplar, and final cause of all things. He is the highest efficient cause, for that there is no creature that hath any working virtue but from God: but God receiveth not from any other. Again, no cause can work unless it be moved by God, but God is moved by no other. Moreover, among creatures such causes are said to be highest which are universal and of whom particular causes depend, as the heavens and angels which move the heavens: but God made both the heavens and angels. He therefore is the first and highest efficient cause. And he is the first exemplar cause, for he made all things according to the ideas or forms which in himself he hath.

Lastly, he is also the first final cause, for he created all things for himself, to wit, for manifestation of his glory, as the wise man saith in the Proverbs.† Moreover, God is most high, because he sitteth in a most high throne. *I saw God*, saith Isaias, *sitting upon an high throne and elevated.*‡ And since a seat hath two uses, the one to judge, the other to rest in, let us then consider each of them apart.

* Luke x 18.

† Prov. xvi 4.

‡ Isa. vi 1.

CHAPTER VI

GOD HATH A MOST HIGH THRONE, FOR HE IS THE HIGHEST KING AND JUDGE, BRINGING GRACE TO THE HUMBLE

FIRST, God hath a most high throne, because he is the highest judge. For Abraham said unto God: *Thou dost judge all the earth* ;* and David: *In the midst he judgeth gods*,† that is, God judgeth the judges themselves, who in the Scripture are called gods.‡ And most plainly St James saith: *There is one lawmaker and judge*,§ that is to say, God only is the true lawgiver and judge: for he only giveth laws to all and receiveth them of none, judgeth all and is judged of none. Moreover, God is not only a judge, but also a king, and therefore he judgeth not like a judge appointed by a king, but as the highest commanding king, for which cause he is called the *King of Kings*,|| and *a great king above all gods*,¶ and *terrible to the kings of the earth*,** because he transferreth kingdoms and empires from one nation unto another, and taketh away the spirit of princes when he pleaseth.

* Gen. xviii 25.

† Ps. lxxxix 1.

‡ Exod. xxii 28; Ps. xlii 10; John x 34.

§ Jas. iv 12.

|| Apoc. xix 16.

¶ Ps. xciv 3.

** Ps. lxxv 13.

Neither is God the highest king and judge only, but also an absolute Lord, which is the highest title of all. For kings are not such absolute lords over their subjects as that they may, when they please, deprive them of their goods and lives.

Whereof King Achab can be a witness, who would have had Naboth's vineyard, yet could not but by the treachery and calumny of his wife, for which cause they both miserably perished.* But God is an absolute Lord whom all things do serve and yet he serveth none: and he could, if he should so please, reduce all things to nothing because he made them all of nothing.

Think, therefore, my soul, what great fear and reverence we worms of the earth owe unto him that sitteth upon the highest throne! *If I be the Lord*, saith he by the prophet Malachy, *where is my fear?*† And if the highest angels of heaven serve him with fear and trembling, what ought we frail mortal men to do, who dwell on the earth with beasts?

But to some it may seem strange why God, who is most high, loveth not creatures which therein resemble him, to wit, the high and lofty, but the humble and poor. For so speaketh God by Isaias: *To whom shall I have respect, but to the poor little one, and the*

* 3 Kings xxi 2 sqq.

† Mal. i 6.

*contrite of spirit, and him that trembleth at my words ?** And David: *Our Lord is high and beholdeth the low things.*† Yes, surely God loveth high and lofty creatures if therein they resemble him; but then they must be high in deed and not in appearance. God, therefore, loveth not the proud which are elate and puffed up: not truly high. But he loveth the humble and such as tremble at his words, and exalteth them, and they are high indeed whom he exalteth. Those, therefore, that are humble are high, to wit, humble in their own eyes and high in the eyes of God.

If one had seen (not only with his bodily but also with his mental eyes illuminated by God) the rich glutton clothed in purple sitting at his table furnished with all kinds of costly meats, attended with many servants diligently doing their offices; and at the same time had likewise beheld poor Lazarus, half-naked and covered in sores, sitting at the rich man's gate, and begging to be filled with the crumbs that fell from his table; he truly should have seen the rich man whom the world accounted most happy, to be in the eyes of God and his angels, as vile and abominable as the dung and dirt of the earth: *For that which is high to men, is abominable before God,*‡ saith our Lord in the

* Isa. lxvi 2. † Ps. cxii 4, 6. ‡ Luke xvi 15.

same place where he describeth the rich glutton.

But on the other side he should have seen the poor dejected Lazarus to be esteemed and ennobled in the eyes of God and his angels as a precious margarite, which in the end proved true. For Lazarus, as the beloved of God, was carried by the hands of angels into Abraham's bosom: and the rich man (as hateful to God) was dragged by the devils into the hell of fire.*

But why speak I of Lazarus? There is none higher with God than our Lord Jesus Christ, even according to his humanity: and yet neither in heaven nor earth is there to be found any more humble than he. So that he said most truly: *Learn of me because I am meek and humble.*† For as that most holy soul doth know more perfectly than all other the infinite height of the divinity, so it doth more perfectly know the baseness of a creature which is made of nothing; and, therefore, being also itself a creature, it is most humbled and subjected to God, and by him exalted above all creatures.

The like we may also say of blessed angels and souls of holy men. For there are none more humble than those which possess the highest places in heaven, because they, being more near to God, do more clearly see how

* Luke xvi 19, 31.

† Matt. xi 29.

great the difference is between the greatness of the Creator and the smallness of the creature.

Therefore, my soul, love humility, if thou desire true glory; imitate the Lamb without spot, imitate his Virgin Mother, imitate the cherubims and seraphims, all which the higher they are, the more humble also they are.

CHAPTER VII

THE THRONE OF THE HIGHEST GOD SIGNIFIETH MOST BLESSED REST

NEITHER hath God only a most high throne, because he judgeth all; but also because he resteth more than all, and maketh them to rest upon whom he sitteth. God's most high throne is his most high rest: for although he governeth the whole world in which are continual conflicts and wars of elements, of beasts and men, yet he judgeth with tranquillity, as it is said in the book of Wisdom,* and always enjoyeth most high rest. Neither can anything trouble his quietness and the contemplation of himself, wherein he taketh his eternal delight. Therefore he is called the King of Jerusalem, which is to say, the vision of peace.† But

* Wisd. xii 9 *sqq.*

† Tob. xiii 11; Ps. cxv 19; Eccli. xxiv 15.

his peculiar throne is upon the blessed angels, therefore it is said: He that sitteth upon the cherubims.* For God is said to sit rather upon the cherubims than upon the seraphims, for the cherubims signify multiplicity of knowledge, and the seraphims heat of love; and rest followeth wisdom, but care and anxiety followeth love, unless it be accompanied with wisdom. Therefore the soul of a righteous man is also called the seat of wisdom.† Moreover, when Isaias saith: *Heaven is my seat*,‡ and when David saith: *The Heaven of Heaven is to our Lord*,§ by the Heaven of Heaven is understood the spiritual heavens which dwell upon the corporal heavens, to wit, the blessed angels, as St Augustine saith in his exposition of the hundred and thirteenth Psalm.|| And these heavens God maketh to rest so admirably, that it is a peace which passeth all understanding.¶ St Bernard, in one of his sermons upon the Canticles, setteth down a very fit similitude to declare this rest in these words: *Tranquillus Deus, tranquillat omnia, etc.* (God being quiet, quieteth all things, and to behold his quietness is to rest).

* Ps. lxxix 2, xcvi 1.

† Prov. viii 12; Isa. xi 2.

‡ Isa. lxvi 1.

§ Ps. cxiii 24.

|| *Enarrat. in Ps. CXIII, sermo ii, No. 11.*

¶ Phil. iv 7.

We see a king after daily suits of causes heard before him, to dismiss the company, to avoid the troubles of the Court and to go at night into his privy chamber with a few whom he familiarly loveth, thinking himself the more sure the more secret he is, and being the more pleasant the more quietly he beholdeth those few whom he loveth.* Thus he, whereby he plainly declareth that God showeth himself unto blessed souls, not as a judging Lord, but as a familiar friend. And truly the familiarity which God also showeth in this life to pure and chaste minds is incredible. For of him it is said: *My delights to be with the children of men.*† And that saying: *And his talk is with the simple.*‡

Hence was it that all the saints (albeit they suffered pressures in this world) had, notwithstanding, peace in their hearts where God dwelt. Therefore they seemed and were indeed always joyful and quiet. For to them the Truth said: *Your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man shall take from you.*§

* *In Cant.*, sermo xxiii.

‡ *Prov.* iii 32.

† *Prov.* viii 31.

§ *John* xvi 22.

CHAPTER VIII

OF THE MANIFOLD DEPTH OF THE ESSENCE
OF GOD

THERE remaineth the fourth part of dimension, which is called depth. The depth of God's essence is manifold. First, the divinity is in itself most deep, solid, and substantial. Not like a gilded wedge, which hath gold only in the outside, but within is brass or wood; but like an endless wedge of gold of great and immeasurable mass; or rather like a mine of gold so deep that by digging it can never be emptied. So is God wholly incomprehensible, for as a mine of gold without bottom can never be emptied with digging, so God, *whose greatness is without end*,* can never be so perfectly known by any creature but that there still remaineth more to be known; and God only comprehendeth that depth who only hath an infinite understanding.

Depth also belongeth to God in respect of place, for as he is most high and above all, so he is most deep and under all. Who, as the Apostle saith: *Carrieth all things by the word of his power*.† God is therefore as the foundation and roof of a house, *in whom*

* Ps. cxliv 3.

† Heb. i 3.

*we live and move and be.** So that Solomon said most truly: *Heaven and the Heaven of Heavens cannot contain thee.†* For God rather containeth the heavens and all things under them, because he is both above the heavens and under the earth.

Furthermore, God's depth is his invisibility. For God is *light*, but *unaccessible:‡* he is truth, but most secret. *Thou hast put darkness thy covert,§* saith David, and, *verily he is God hidden,||* as Isaias speaketh. St Augustine, seeking God on a time, sent his eyes as messengers from earth to heaven, and all things answered: *We are not him whom thou seekest: but he made us.¶* Whereupon, not finding God by ascension through outward things, he began to ascend through inward things, and from them he learned that God was more easily to be found; for he knew that the soul was better than the body, and the inward sense than the outward sense, and the understanding than it. Whence he gathered that God (who is more inward than the understanding) was better than the understanding. Therefore whatsoever we understand or conceive is not God, but some other thing less than God, for he is better than we can conceive.

* Acts xvii 28.

† 1 Tim. vi 16.

|| Isa. xlv 15.

† 3 Kings viii 27.

§ Ps. xvii 12.

¶ Conf., x 6.

Go to now then, my soul, if thou art better than thy body, to whom thou givest life, because it is a body and thou a spirit: and if the eye of thy body cannot see thee, because it is without and thou within. So think likewise that thy God is better than thou art, because he is a spirit more high and inward than thou; for thou dwellest, as it were, without, but he resideth in his most profound and secret tabernacle. But shalt thou never be admitted thither? God forbid! Thy Lord doth not lie who saith: *Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God.** Nor his Apostle who said: *We see now by a glass in a dark sort, but then face to face.*† Nor St John the Evangelist who writ: *We know that when he shall appear, we shall be like to him, because we shall see him as he is.*‡ How great then will thy joy be, when in that secret and sacred sanctuary thou shalt see and enjoy that light, beauty, and goodness itself! Then shall it plainly appear how vain, transitory, and of small moment the goods of this earth are: wherewith men being inebriated forget the true and everlasting. But if thou thirst indeed after the living God, and if *thy tears be bread unto thee day and night whiles it is said, where is thy God?*§ be not slow to cleanse thy heart

* Matt. v 8.

‡ 1 John iii 2.

† 1 Cor. xiii 12.

§ Ps. xli 4.

ASCENT OF THE MIND TO GOD

whereby thou mayest see God: be not weary to dispose ascensions in thy heart until the God of Gods shall be seen in Sion. Neither wax thou cold in the love of God and thy neighbour, *nor love in word and in tongue, but in deed and truth.** For that is the way that leadeth to life everlasting.

* 1 John iii 18.



THE ELEVENTH STEP

FROM THE CONSIDERATION OF THE
GREATNESS OF GOD'S POWER,
BY THE SIMILITUDE OF A
CORPORAL QUANTITY

CHAPTER I

OF THE BREADTH OF THE POWER OF GOD

GREAT is our Lord and there is no end of his greatness. For he is not only great because omnipotence is his height; infinite wisdom his depth; incomprehensible mercy his breadth; and justice like a rod of iron his length, but also for that these attributes are infinite in breadth, length, height, and depth.

And to begin from his power, or rather his omnipotency: the breadth of God's power consisteth in extension to infinite things.

First, it is extended to all things made, for there is nothing from the greatest angel to the least worm, or from the highest heaven to the lowest hell, which was not made by the power of God: *All things, saith St John, were made by him, and without him was made*

*nothing. And after, The world was made by him.**

Secondly, it is extended to all things that shall be made. For as nothing has been made but by him, so likewise nothing shall be made but by him. For so speaketh the Apostle: *Of him, and by him, and in him are all things.†*

Thirdly, it is extended to all things that may be made. So speaketh the angel: *There shall not be impossible with God any word,‡* and our Lord himself saith: *With God all things are possible.§*

Fourthly, it is extended to the destruction of all things made. For as God could by a flood of water destroy at once all men and other living creatures upon earth, except a few, which it pleased him to preserve within Noah's Ark;|| so he can by a flood of fire at one time destroy not only all men and other creatures found living at the last day, but also all trees, cities, and other things upon earth. *The day of our Lord, saith St Peter the Apostle in his last Epistle, shall come as a thief, in the which the heavens shall pass with great violence, but the elements shall be resolved with heat and the earth and the works which are on it shall be burnt.¶*

* John i 3, 10.

† Luke i 37.

‡ Gen. vii 1 sqq.

† Rom. xi 36.

§ Matt. xix 26.

¶ 2 Pet. iii 10.

Great surely is the breadth of God's power, and which none can sufficiently admire, unless he could number all the creatures, which God hath made, shall make or can make. And who is able to do, but he whose knowledge is infinite? This power also may seem the greater, when we imagine how great a thing it is to destroy things made so many ages in one moment, or as Judas Machabeus saith: *To destroy with one beck.** Let us therefore say with Moses: *Who is like to thee among the strong, O Lord?*†

CHAPTER II

OF THE LENGTH OF THE POWER OF GOD

THE length of God's power is seen by continual co-operation with all things made, and yet neither is, nor ever shall be wearied; for it cannot be lessened, weakened, or decayed by any means, because it is truly eternal, or rather the true eternity of the divinity.

Some wonder how the sun, moon, and stars can move so long time with such speed from east to west, and return again to their courses without any intermission. And surely it were much to be wondered at, but that we know they are carried by God almighty:

* 2 Mach. viii 18.

† Exod. xv 11.

*Who carrieth all things by the word of his power.**

Others wonder how it can be that in hell the fire is not consumed which burneth everlastingly, nor the bodies of those wretches dissolved which are for ever scorched in those flames. And this may be thought not only admirable, but also impossible, were it not that God (who is almighty and everlasting) causeth that fire so to burn that it is never quenched, and so preserveth the bodies of those wretches in that fire that they are always tormented and never consumed.

Others wonder, moreover, how God carrieth and sustaineth all things and yet is not wearied with so huge a burthen, for a strong man, horse, ox, or elephant, can carry a great weight a little while; or a very great weight for a very short while. But to carry a most great burthen an everlasting time without weariness surpasseth the strength of any creature.

But indeed they had cause to wonder, if the power of God were in weight and measure, as the power of creatures is. But since his power is infinite, it is no marvel if he can bear a great burthen an infinite time without weariness. Let us say, therefore, with the holy prophet Moses: *Who is like to thee among the strong, O Lord?*

* Heb. i 3.

CHAPTER III

OF THE HEIGHT OF THE POWER OF GOD

FOLLOWETH the height of God's power, which consisteth chiefly in two things.

First, in that it only hath made most high things. Sublunary things God made in the first creation: yet they may by action of creatures be engendered, altered, or corrupted, for the elements are in part mutually changed: herbs and plants spring from the earth, beasts are bred of beasts, fishes are engendered in the water, clouds and rain in the air, and comets in the fire.

But the heavens and the stars, which are the highest bodies, God only created, and he alone doth so preserve, that no creature hath power to make, change, alter, or corrupt them. *I shall see, saith the Psalmist, thy heavens, the works of thy fingers, the moon and stars which thou hast founded.** For he that is most high hath kept the highest works for himself only; he began to frame them from their foundation, and hath brought them to their perfection.

He also by his infinite power created, preserveth, and for ever will preserve things spiritual (as angels and the souls of men, which are his noblest and highest works)

* Ps. viii 4.

from death. For creatures have no part in doing these things; neither can they, all joined together, create or destroy one angel or one soul.

Secondly, the height of God's power is seen in miracles, which, as St Augustine teacheth, *are works beside the usual course and order of Nature, whereat the very angels and Nature herself doth wonder*.^{*} Which of the angels did not wonder to see the sun and moon, which run their course so speedily, stand still at the commandment of Josue?† And that we may not think it fell out casually (for none can imagine how a thing so unusual could be done by a mortal man), the Holy Ghost saith: *God obeying the voice of a man*.‡ For Josue did not properly speak unto the sun and moon, which he knew could not hear his commandment, but he prayed to God, as if he should say: *Thou sun (by the commandment of God) against Gabaon move not, and thou moon against the valley of Ajalon. And the Lord obeyed the voice of a man*. That is, caused those lights to obey the voice of a man, for oftentimes in Holy Scripture God is said to do those things whereof he is the cause that they are done. As in Genesis when the Lord said to Abraham: *Now have I known that thou fearest*

^{*} St Aug., *In Joan. Tractat. XXIV, No. 1.*

† Jos. x 12 sqq.

‡ *Ibid.*

*God.** The meaning of those words is: Now have I caused that both thyself and others know that thou truly fearest God.

The like also was that work, signifying the height of God's power, at the Passion of our Lord: when the moon, which was very far distant from the sun, approached with incredible speed unto the sun and eclipsing it three hours, caused darkness upon the whole earth, and after with like speed returned to the place from whence she came; all which St Dionysius the Areopagite, in his Epistle to St Polycarp, doth witness that he saw and observed. And this truly is a wonder contrary to the former, though no less strange, for it is as unusual, and as much above the whole power of Nature to make the moon run her course more speedily than she is accustomed, as it is to make her stand still.

I omit the giving sight to the blind, the raising of the dead and many such-like miracles, which God hath done and doth by his prophets, Apostles, and others his faithful servants, all which do cry: *Who is like to thee among the strong, O Lord?*

But I cannot omit that chief and greatest miracle, which God shall show at the day of judgement, when all the dead shall rise together, albeit the bodies of many of them

* Gen. xxii 12.

have been burned to ashes and scattered in the winds, or devoured by beasts and changed into other bodies, or buried in fields and orchards and altered into sundry herbs.

Which of the angels but will wonder to behold in the twinkling of an eye so many millions of millions of millions of men, at the commandment of the Almighty, to take again their bodies, albeit they have lain hid for many ages, and after divers manners have been dispersed and consumed?

This, therefore, is the height of God's power, in regard whereof it may likewise be said: *Who is like to thee among the strong, O Lord?*

CHAPTER IV

• OF THE DEPTH OF THE POWER OF GOD

THERE remaineth the depth of his power, which seemeth to me to consist in the manner which God useth in making things. For who can conceive how something is made of nothing? They could not sound this depth, who held it for a certain and approved principle, *that of nothing, nothing is made*. And we also in this believe what we see not;* but we believe God, who cannot lie.† I say we believe that heaven and earth and all things that are therein were created by God,

* John xx 29; Heb. xi 1.

† Heb. vi 18.

without any precedent matter whereof they were made. But how this could be done is a thing too deep for us to find out. Moreover, God did not only make all things of nothing, but also in nothing; to wit, without precedent space or place to contain them in, which is hard to understand, especially in corporal things. And therefore this depth also is not to be sounded. *Take away, saith St Augustine, in his epistle to Dardanus, the distances of places from bodies, and they shall be nowhere, and because they shall be nowhere, they shall not be.** If, therefore, nothing was before God created heaven and earth, where did he place heaven and earth? Truly not in nothing; and yet they are created and placed in themselves, because he so would and could who can do all things, although we cannot conceive how they are done. This did God himself signify, when, declaring his omnipotence to holy Job, he said: *Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, if thou hast understanding, who set the measures thereof, if thou know? Or who stretched out the line upon it? Upon what are the foundations thereof grounded? Or who let down the corner-stone thereof?†* And that we might understand these works of God's omnipotence

* *Ep.* CLXXXVII, c. 6, No. 18.

† *Job xxxviii* 4-6.

to be most noteworthy of all praise, the Lord himself presently added: *When the morning stars praised me together, and all the sons of God made jubilation.** To wit, the holy angels, which were created together with heaven and earth, and are, as it were, spiritual stars so bright that they may be called the sons of God, when they saw heaven and earth created of nothing and placed in nothing, and yet to be most firmly founded upon their own stability, with wonderful admiration and jubilation they praised the omnipotency of their Maker.

Neither is it less profound to understand how God by the only command of his will did erect such huge buildings. For we know that in edifices less without comparison how many instruments, engines, and workmen architects want. Who, therefore, can conceive how by will only (which never goeth out of the thing that willeth) so great and manifold works could be made? God said (but to himself, for *the Word of God is in God, and is God*†), he said, I say, commanding and expressing the commandment of his will: Be heaven made, and heaven was made. Be earth made, and earth was made: be light made: be a sun made: be stars made: be trees made: be beasts made: be men made: be angels made: and all things were

* Job xxxviii 7.

† John i 1, 2.

made. Add also that the same God can if he will *destroy all things with one beck*, as we read in the book of Machabees.*

It is likewise a depth unsoundable how God made all these great and manifold things, consisting of so many parts and members, in a moment. Nature and art with us require a long time to perfect their works. We see herbs are sown long before they grow: and oftentimes many years pass before trees take root, extend their boughs, and bring forth fruit. Beasts likewise carry their young ones long within them; and after, they feed them long also before they grow great. I will say nothing of art, for experience sheweth that our artisans can bring nothing to perfection but in a competent time.

How great, therefore, is the power of God, which in a moment hath brought so great things to perfection? But I dispute not, whether God in a moment made heaven and earth and all things therein; or whether he spent six whole days in the first creation of things. For I undertake not to clear doubts, but to frame ascensions unto God from the consideration of things. That, then, which I affirm and admire is, that every particular thing was made in a moment by the omnipotent Creator, for of the earth,

* 2 Mach. viii 18.

water, air, and fire there is no doubt, as also of the angels, but that they were created altogether in a moment, of the firmament and division of waters it is likewise certain that all was done by the powerful word only of the speaker, saying: *Be a firmament made amidst the waters*, and that in a moment; for it followeth: *And it was so done*.^{*} Upon which place St John Chrysostom saith: *He only said and the work followed*. And the same author upon those words (*Let the earth shoot forth green herbs and it was so done*†), saith: *Who would not wonder to think, how at the word of the Lord, the earth should shoot forth sundry flowers, and adorn her face, as it were, with an admirable embroidery? You might have seen the earth, which before was without form, on the sudden to become almost as fair as the heaven*. And after, upon those words (*be there lights made*) thus he speaketh: *He only said, and this admirable element was made, I mean the sun*. What if you add that in the same moment and with the same word the same Creator made the moon and all the stars? Also upon these words, *Let the waters bring forth*, thus he speaketh: *What tongue can sufficiently praise the Maker? For even as when he said to the earth, let it shoot forth, and presently there appeared great plenty of sundry herbs and flowers: so*

^{*} Gen. i 6, 7.

† Gen. i 11 sqq.

*here he said, let the water bring forth, and forthwith so many kinds of fowls, and creeping creatures were made, as no tongue can rehearse.**

Who therefore is like to thee among the strong, O Lord?

CHAPTER V

THE SOUL IS STIRRED UP TO THE FEAR OF GOD
AND THE OBSERVATION OF HIS COM-
MANDMENTS

THOU dost now plainly understand, O my soul, how great the power of thy Maker is, whose breadth is infinite, whose length is eternal, surveying and governing all things without weariness; whose height doth things which seem impossible and are so, but to him only; whose depth maketh things in such sort that the manner thereof surpasseth the understanding of any creature: for he maketh them of nothing, and in nothing, without tools and without time, only by his word and commandment. *He said, saith the prophet, and they were made; he commanded and they were created.†*

Whence thou must gather, if thou be wise, how much it importeth thee to please and not offend him, and to have him thy friend

* St Chrys., *In Gen. Hom.* IV-VII.

† Ps. cxlviii 5.

and not thy enemy, for being offended with thee, he can in a moment deprive thee of all good, and fill thee with all misery: neither is there any that can deliver thee from his hands. If being naked and alone thou shouldst meet with thy mortal enemy, who assailed thee with a sharp sword, what wouldst thou do? How wouldst thou sweat, look pale, and tremble, and casting thyself on thy knees, beg for mercy! And yet he is a man, so that, perhaps, thou mightst escape by flight, or by struggling, wrest the sword out of his hand, and deliver thyself from death.

But what wilt thou do when God is angry, from whom thou canst not fly, for he is everywhere; whom thou canst not resist, for he is Almighty; and whom thou canst not delay, for he worketh in a moment by his command only. Not without cause, said the Apostle: *It is horrible to fall into the hands of the living God.** But on the other side, if thou please God, and have him thy friend, who is more happy than thou? For he can if he will, and he will if he be thy friend, give thee all good and deliver thee from all evil.

It is also in thy power while thou livest here, to offend and make him thine enemy, or to please and make him thy friend. For

* Heb. x 31.

God first by his prophets and after by his Son and his Apostles, doth in the Holy Scriptures continually invite sinners to repentance, and the righteous to keep his commandments; that he may thereby have them both to be his friends; or rather his dearly beloved children and heirs of his everlasting kingdom. Hear Ezechiel: *Live I, saith the Lord, I will not the death of the impious, but that the impious convert from his way and live. Convert, convert ye from your evil ways : and why will you die, O house of Israel? And after: The impiety of the impious shall not hurt him, in whatever day soever he shall convert from his impiety.**

And as Ezechiel speaketh, so doth Isaias, Jeremias, and the other prophets: for the same spirit spake alike in them all.

Hear the Son of God also, beginning his sermon: *Jesus, saith St Matthew, began to preach and to say, Do penance for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.†* Hear the Apostle St Paul, speaking of himself and his fellow Apostles in his last Epistle to the Corinthians: *For Christ, saith he, we are legates, God as it were exhorting by us. For Christ, we beseech you, be reconciled to God.‡* What more plain? What more pleasing? The Apostle doth beseech us in the name of

* Ezech. xxxiii 11, 12.

† Matt. iv 17.

‡ 2 Cor. v 20.

Christ to be reconciled to God, and to please and not offend him—who can doubt of God's mercy, if he truly return to him? For he receiveth them as a most loving father receiveth his prodigal sons which return unto him.* And when we are returned and pardoned, what doth he more require of us to continue his children and friends, but to keep his commandments? *If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments*, saith our Lord.†

And lest, perhaps, thou shouldst say that without God's assistance the commandments cannot be kept, hear St Augustine in his exposition of the Psalms, where, speaking of the hardest commandment, to wit, of spending our lives for our brethren, he saith thus: *Non imperaret hoc Deus, etc. God would not command us to do it, if he judged it impossible for men to do. And if considering thy weakness thou faintest under the commandments, take comfort by the example; for the example concerneth thee much. He who gave the example is present also to give the aid.‡ And, that every word may stand in the mouth of two.§* Hear St Leo: *Justly, saith he, doth God require us by his command, because he doth prevent us with his aid.||*

* Luke xv 20 sqq.

† Matt. xix 17.

‡ *Enarrat. in Ps. LVI, No. 1.*

§ Matt. xviii 16.

|| *De Pass. Dom. Sermon. XVI.*

Why then dost thou fear, O my soul, to enter into the way of the commandments, since he runneth before thee, who by the mighty help of his grace *maketh crooked things become straight, and rough ways plain*?* For by this preventing aid, *the yoke of our Lord is made sweet, and his burthen light*;† and St John the Apostle saith, *His commandments are not heavy*.‡

But if they seem heavy to thee, think how much more heavy the torments of hell will be: and do not (unless thou be senseless) seek to try them.

Often think with thyself, and never forget, that now is the time of mercy, and after of justice; now of freedom to sin, after of intolerable torments for sin; now may a man easily compound with God and with a little labour of repentance obtain a great pardon, and with a short sorrow redeem eternal lamentation.

Now also with every good deed proceeding from charity obtain the kingdom of heaven: after not for all the wealth in the world procure one drop of cold water.

* Isa. xl 4.

† Matt. xi 30.

‡ 1 John v 3.



THE TWELFTH STEP

FROM THE CONSIDERATION OF THE
GREATNESS OF GOD'S WISDOM,
BY THE SIMILITUDE OF A
CORPORAL QUANTITY

CHAPTER I

THE BREADTH OF THE WISDOM OF GOD DOTH
LIE IN THE PERFECT KNOWLEDGE OF
ALL THINGS

WHOSO will attentively consider the breadth, length, height, and depth of God's wisdom, may easily understand how truly the Apostle writ in his Epistle to the Romans: *God the only wise.**

And to begin from the breadth: God's wisdom is most broad because he knoweth all things distinctly and perfectly. Neither doth he know their substances only, but also their parts, properties, virtues, accidents, and actions. Hence are these words: *Thou indeed hast numbered my steps.*† And: *The Lord doth respect the ways of a man, and considereth all his steps.*‡

* Rom. xvi 27. † Job xiv 16. ‡ Prov. v 21.

Wherefore, if he number and consider all his steps, much more doth he the good or bad actions of his mind. And if *God hath numbered the hairs of our head*, according to his Word,* much more doth he know all the members of our bodies, and all the virtues of our minds. And if he know the number of the sea sands and drops of rain, as is gathered out of Ecclesiasticus,† how much more may we believe he knoweth the number of stars and angels? And if all the idle words of men shall be judged, as our Lord himself doth witness,‡ his ears doubtless do hear at once all the words of men whether they be corporal or mental. How infinite, then, is this breadth of wisdom which comprehendeth at once all things that are, have been, shall be, or may be!

Neither doth the divine mind become more base, by the knowledge of so many particular inferior things, as the foolish wisdom of some philosophers supposed. For perhaps we might think so, if God did borrow his knowledge from things as we do; but since he beholdeth all things in his own essence, there is no danger of baseness.

Albeit, it is much more noble to borrow knowledge as men do, than altogether to want it, as beasts do; even as it is better to

* Matt. x 30.

† Eccli. i 2.

‡ Matt. xii 36.

be blind, as sensitive living creatures may be, than without blindness to be unapt to see, as stones are. Neither are the other members of the body more noble than the eyes, for that they cannot be blind. But the eyes are more noble because they can see, although they may also be blind, as St Augustine doth truly teach in his books of the City of God.*

Thou oughtst, therefore, to be careful, my soul, always and everywhere what thou dost, what thou speakest, and what thou thinkest, since thou canst not do, speak, or think anything, but God seeth, heareth and knoweth it. And if thou dare not do or speak any evil (although thou never so much desire it) when thou thinkest a man seeth or heareth thee, how darest thou think such things when God beholdeth thee and is offended with thee? *Esto a nemine: Suppose no man see thee* (saith St Augustine), *yet how wilt thou escape him who looketh from above, from whom nothing is hid?*† And St Basil, in his book of Virginity, speaking to a virgin shut up alone in her chamber, doth exhort her to reverence that spouse who is everywhere with the Father and Holy Ghost, accompanied with innumerable multitudes of angels and souls of holy fathers: *For there is none of them*, saith he, *but seeth all things*

* *De Civ. Dei*, XII, c. 1, No. 3.

† St Aug., *Ep.* CCXI, No. 10.

*everywhere.** Oh, happy shouldst thou be, my soul, if thou wert always in this company! How perfectly shouldst thou lead thy life! How diligently wouldst thou avoid all lightness and wandering! For so indeed our Lord said once to Abraham: *Walk before me, and be thou perfect*;† that is, think that I always see thee, and without doubt thou shalt be perfect.

CHAPTER II

THE LENGTH OF GOD'S WISDOM MANIFESTS ITSELF BY THE KNOWLEDGE OF THINGS TO COME

THE length of God's wisdom is manifested by the knowledge of things to come. For his sight is so sharp that he saw from all eternity what shall be in the last time, and for ever after, than which length nothing greater can be imagined. *Thou hast understood*, saith David in the psalms, *my cogitations far off*; and a little later: *Thou hast known all the last things and them of old*,‡ to wit, all things to come and all things past. The books of the prophets are full of most true and plain predictions, which not they themselves, but as singeth Zacharias: *God spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, that*

* *De Virginit.*, c. 7.

† Gen. xvii 1.

‡ Ps. cxxxviii 3, 5.

are from the beginning.* This prophesying and foreseeing is therefore proper to God only, as God himself saith by Isaias: *Show what things are to come hereafter and we shall know that ye are gods.*† And to consider a few things of many, Isaias speaketh in this manner: *Thus saith the Lord to my anointed Cyrus, whose right hand I have taken, to subdue the Gentiles before his face, and to turn the backs of kings, etc.,*‡ in which words the monarchy of the Persians is foretold: and Cyrus, the first king of the Persians, is called by his proper name: the reason also is set down why God would exalt Cyrus, to wit, because he should release the captivity of Babylon, all which things were fulfilled about two hundred years after. Daniel, likewise, by the similitude of a great statue, *the head whereof was of gold, the breast of silver, the belly and thighs of brass, the feet partly of iron and partly of earth,*§ doth plainly prophesy of the four monarchies of the Babylonians, Persians, Grecians, and Romans: and in the time of the last monarchy, of the kingdom of Christ, to wit, of the Christian Church, which should be greater than all those kingdoms. And afterwards he so plainly describeth the wars of the successors of Alexander the Great,|| that

* Luke i 70.

† Isa. xli 23.

‡ Isa. xlv 1.

§ Dan. ii 31 sqq.

|| Dan. xi 5 sqq.

some infidels thought those things were written after those wars were ended. And to omit the rest, Christ himself, in St Luke, bewailing the destruction of Jerusalem, doth likewise describe all things so plainly and particularly, as if he had been to describe it already past, and not as then to come.* I let pass innumerable other predictions, whereof, as I have said, the books of the prophets are full.

But astrologers, and all such soothsayers that will seem to be, as it were, God's apes, are utterly to be scorned. For it cannot be that they should foretell the truth in things that happen casually, and especially by election, unless perhaps sometime by chance: for seeing that the will of God doth govern and overrule all causes both necessary, casual, and free, and can when he pleaseth hinder inferior causes, none can foretell the truth in anything, but whom God shall be pleased to manifest his said will unto, as oftentimes he did unto his prophets. And this is so certain that the devils would be accounted gods, chiefly because they founded oracles and foretold things to come, as St Augustine doth witness in his books of the City of God.† But that excellent Doctor of the Church, in his book of the

* Luke xix 41.

† *De Civ. Dei*, II, c. 24, No. 1.

Divination of Devils, doth plainly show that their divination is as false as their divinity. For they foretell nothing plainly, but what themselves are to do, or which, being elsewhere already done, they by the swiftness of their nature report to those that dwell far off as a thing to be done, or by their long experience conjecture it to be done. After which manner mariners also are accustomed to foretell many things of the winds, husbandmen of the weather, and physicians of diseases. And when the devils are asked of things to come which they know not, they are wont to answer by circumstances of words and equivocation, and when those things prove false, they lay the fault on their interpreters or soothsayers.*

Therefore the Lord our God only, *whose wisdom is endless*,† foundeth true oracles, and foretelleth the truth in all things to come, both casual and by election.

CHAPTER III

OF THE MOST HIGH WISDOM OF GOD

GOD'S wisdom also is most high, and far above the wisdom of men or angels. Height of wisdom is known by the height of the object, power, form, and act.

* St Aug., *De Divinat. daemonum*, c 3, No. 17, c. 5, No. 9, c. 6, No. 10.

† Ps. cxlvi 5.

The natural and proportionable object of God's wisdom is his divine essence, which is so high that it surpasseth the understanding of men or angels. And therefore the highest angels cannot ascend to see God, unless they be lifted up by the light of glory. For which cause God in the Holy Scriptures is called *invisible*: *To the king of worlds, immortal, invisible, only God*, saith the Apostle in his first Epistle to Timothy;* and after he affirmeth also: *That God inhabiteth light not accessible.*† Power likewise, which in us is an accident, is in God a divine substance and therefore higher without comparison than in us. The form also is the higher the more it doth represent, and therefore those angels which have fewer and more universal forms are said to have most knowledge. How high then is God's wisdom, which hath no form but his own essence, which being simply one, sufficeth alone for God to behold himself and all creatures which are made, shall be made, or may be made!

That wisdom, moreover, is said to be most high which knoweth most by fewest acts: but God with one eternal sight perfectly knoweth himself and all other things. Wherefore the wisdom of God alone is meetly considered most noble and high.

* 1 Tim. i 17.

† 1 Tim. vi 16.

Lift up now thine eyes, O my soul, and behold how far thy knowledge is inferior to the knowledge of thy Maker. For thou, by many acts discoursing to and fro, canst hardly know any one thing perfectly, but thy Maker doth by one act perfectly and distinctly know himself and all other things. Yet thou, which now art in darkness, mayest, if thou wilt endeavour, ascend so high by the wings of faith and charity that, after the laying aside of this mortal body, *being transformed from glory unto glory in the light of God, thou mayest see God the light,** and being made like to God, thou also with one eternal sight mayest behold God in himself, and thyself and all other creatures in God. *For what doth he not see, saith St Gregory in his Dialogues, who seeth him that seeth all things, and how great shall be that pleasure, that glory, that plenty, when, being admitted to that inaccessible light, thou shalt be partaker of all the good things of thy Lord!†*

The Queen of Saba, when she heard the wisdom of Solomon, and saw the excellent order of the servants of his house, was so astonished, that, as the Scripture saith, *She had no longer spirit, but cried out, Blessed are thy men, and blessed are thy servants, which stand before thee always, and hear thy wisdom.‡*

* Ps. xxxv 10; 2 Cor. iii 18.

† *Dial.*, iv, c. 33.

‡ 3 Kings x 1 sqq.

But what is the wisdom of Solomon to the wisdom of God, who is the only wise, yea, wisdom itself? And what is the order of his servants to be compared with the nine orders of God's angels, whereof *thousands of thousands minister to him, and ten thousand hundred thousand assist him?** Surely if thou couldst savour these things but a little, thou wouldst most willingly do or suffer anything that thou mightst enjoy God.

Be thou humbled, therefore, in the meanwhile, *under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt thee in the time of visitation*;† subject thy understanding to faith, that thou mayest be exalted to vision; subject thy will to obey the commandments, that thou mayest be exalted into the *liberty of the glory of the children of God*.‡ Subject also thy flesh to patience and labour, that being glorified God may exalt it to eternal rest.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEPTH OF THE WISDOM OF GOD DOTH CHIEFLY LIE IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF OUR THOUGHTS WHICH ARE TO COME

It remaineth that we consider the depth of God's wisdom, which seemeth chiefly to consist in searching of hearts and reins, to wit, in the knowledge of men's thoughts

* Dan. vii 10. † 1 Pet. v 6. ‡ Rom. viii 21.

and desires, especially which are to come, whereupon we read: *Man seeth those things which appear, but the Lord beholdeth the heart.** And: *Thou only hast known the hearts of the sons of men.*† And: *Thou hast understood my cogitations far off; my path thou hast searched out, and thou hast foreseen all my ways.*‡ And: *He knoweth the secrets of the heart.*§ And: *The heart of man is perverse and unsearchable. Who shall know it? I, the Lord, that search the heart and reins.*||

Which place the seventy interpreters have translated: *The heart of man is deep and unsearchable.* And St Jerome, expounding this place, doth truly note that Christ is proved to be God because he saw the hearts of men, which none but God can see.¶ And *Jesus seeing their thoughts; ** But he knew their cogitations; †† Why think ye these things in your hearts? ‡‡*

Every thought, therefore, and desire of man, although it be present and really exist, is so deep that neither angels, devils, or men can penetrate to the knowledge thereof; but yet a thought or desire to come is much more

* 1 Kings xvi 7.

† 2 Paralip. vi 30.

‡ Ps. cxxxviii 3, 4.

§ Ps. xliii 22.

|| Jer. xvii 9, 10.

¶ Comment. in Jer., l. III, No. 960.

** Matt. ix 4.

†† Luke vi 8.

‡‡ Mark ii 8.

deep, for not only are men and angels unable to penetrate it, but also the manner how God, who only knoweth it, cometh to the knowledge thereof.

This did David seem to signify, when he said: *Thy knowledge is become marvellous of me* ;* for that *of me* in the Hebrew phrase signifieth *before me*, or *above me* ; so the sense is: Thy knowledge is more marvellous than I am able to understand how it is. And therefore he addeth: *It is made great and I cannot reach it*—that is, it is lifted above my knowledge, and I cannot by any means ascend to the understanding thereof.

He speaketh of the knowledge of future thoughts, because he said before: *Thou hast understood my cogitations far off and thou hast foreseen all my ways*,† therefore, he addeth concerning the foreknowledge of those cogitations and ways: *Thy knowledge is become marvellous of me; it is made great and I cannot reach to it.*

Someone, perhaps, will answer and say that God seeth these thoughts to come in his eternity, in which all things are present, or in the predetermination of his will; but if it were so, then should not this knowledge be marvellous? For we also know what we intend to do hereafter, or what we have now in hand.

* Ps. cxxxviii 6.

† Ps. cxxxviii 3, 4.

But the Scripture saith that God searcheth the *heart* and *reins*, and there seeth what man thinketh or desireth, or what he will think or desire hereafter. And it is very admirable how God, by searching the heart and reins, can see there that which yet is not, but dependeth of the freedom of the will whether it shall be there or not.

As, therefore, it belongeth to the height of God's power to make something of nothing, and to call those things which are not, as those things which are, so likewise it belongeth to the depth of his wisdom, by searching the *heart* and *reins*, to see there that which as yet is not, as if it already were, because doubtless it shall be.

CHAPTER V

THE ELEVATION OF THE MIND TO THE DIVINE PHYSICIAN, WHO SEARCHETH OUT AND CURETH HEARTS

BUT because I undertake not to dispute questions, but to stir up and elevate the soul to God, be thou therefore stirred up, my soul, and *lift up thyself above thyself*, as Jeremias exhorteth, and think of the profound depth of God's wisdom, which searcheth the secrets of the heart, and seeth there many things which the heart itself seeth not.

ASCENT OF THE MIND TO GOD

O blessed Peter, when thou saidst unto the Lord, *Though I should die with thee, I will not deny thee*,* surely thou spakest not with a double heart, but truly and sincerely; neither didst thou see that frailty in thy heart, which thy Lord saw in it when he said: *Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice*;† for thy most skilful Physician saw the infirmity of thy heart, which thou sawest not, and that was true which the physician foretold, and not that which the patient boasted. Thank, therefore, thy physician, who as he foresaw and foretold thy disease, so by a powerful medicine inspired from above into thy penitent soul he soon cured it.

O good, O pious, O most wise and most mighty Physician: *From my secret sins cleanse me*!‡ How many sins have I which I do not bewail, nor wash with tears because I see them not! Give me thy grace where-with thou searchest hearts and reins; and my evil thoughts, desires, and works, which I see not, thou which seest them, show me; and looking back mercifully upon me, produce in me a fountain of tears, that while time serveth they may be cleansed and washed away by thy grace! Amen.

* Matt. xxvi 34, 35.

† Matt. xxvi 34, 35; Mark xiv 30.

‡ Ps. xviii 13.



THE THIRTEENTH STEP
FROM THE CONSIDERATION OF
GOD'S PRACTICAL WISDOM

CHAPTER I

THE BREADTH OF HIS PRACTICAL WISDOM
SHINETH FORTH BY REASON OF THE
CREATION OF THINGS AND THEIR ARRANGE-
MENT IN MEASURE, NUMBER, AND ORDER

WE have considered the speculative wisdom of God. Let us now consider his practical wisdom, which also we may call effective. This wisdom hath her breadth, length, height, and depth.

The breadth is known by the creation, the length by the preservation of things created, the height by the work of redemption, the depth by Providence and predestination.

And to begin from the creation: *God hath made all things in wisdom,** as it is said in the psalm, *and hath poured her out upon all his works,*† as Ecclesiasticus writeth. As therefore by the creation of all things of nothing, we know the power of their Maker, so like-

* Ps. ciii 24.

† Eccli. i 10.

wise by the admirable workmanship which we behold in every one of them, we wonder at the wisdom of the same Maker. *For he hath disposed all things in measure and number and weight, as the wise man saith.** And with this savour God hath seasoned all things, that thereby we may learn to know how savoury, amiable, and desirable wisdom itself is.

All creatures, therefore, have a certain measure, number, and weight. First, they may be distinguished from God, who hath no measure, because he is immense; nor number, because he is most perfectly and simply one in essence; nor weight, because his price and value exceedeth all estimation. Secondly, for that they are good and beautiful, as Moses truly said: *God saw all things that he had made, and they were very good.†*

All things, therefore, have that measure which is needful for them to obtain the end for which they are made, in such sort that there can be no addition or subtraction therein, but forthwith the thing becometh deformed, unprofitable, and less good than before. *God made all things good in their time, saith the preacher; we cannot add anything, nor take away from those things which God hath made that he may be feared.‡*

* Wisd. xi 21.

† Gen. i 31.

‡ Eccles. iii 11, 14.

God, therefore, hath given to the heaven a most large measure, that it might contain all things below within the compass thereof: to the air much less than to the heaven, yet greater than to the earth and waters which make one globe enclosed round about by the air. To an elephant he hath given a great measure of body, that he might be able to carry great burthens and castles full of men. To the horse a body somewhat less, because he is to carry but one rider. Birds he hath made small, that they might hang their nests upon the boughs of trees; bees and ants the least of all, that they might hide themselves in their hives or in the holes of the earth.

The like we may say of number. God hath made but one sun, because one sun sufficed to give light to the whole earth, and with his brightness to make the day. He made also but one moon, because one moon sufficed to give light in the night. Yet would he have many stars, that whenas the sun and moon were both absent (as at their conjunction it happeneth), they might in some sort put away the darkness of the night. Neither hath he only assigned a necessary number to all things in general, but also hath appointed to each thing in particular, such number of parts that there can be nothing added or taken away. God hath given a man two eyes, two ears, two

hands, two feet, one nose, one mouth, one breast, one head; and he hath appeared a very beautiful and comely creature. Change this order: let a man have one eye, two noses, one ear, two mouths, one hand, one foot, two breasts, or two heads, and nothing can be more unseemly or more deformed.

Finally, God hath given weight, to wit, that estimation to every creature as the nature thereof doth require. By the name of weight or price we understand such qualities as make things good and precious: and they are in number three. Necessary parts, that nothing be superfluous or defective; commensuration, or an apt proportion of parts, and an external amiable colour of the body, with such internal virtues as shall be profitable and necessary for divers actions. And it is marvellous to consider what virtue God hath given to sundry very small and slender creatures, that as his power is in great, so his wisdom might be seen in small things. Who can conceive what virtue is in a grain of mustard seed, which is the least of all seeds, so that the eye can hardly discern it: and yet so great a tree lieth hidden therein *that the fowls of the air come and dwell in the branches thereof*, as the Truth speaketh in the Gospel?*

* Matt. xiii 31, 32.

proper to mustard seed only, but common to all other seeds in whose virtue lieth hid the roots, stems, branches, leaves, blossoms, and fruit of great trees.

Truly if we did not know this by experience we should not easily persuade men, that from so small a seed so many sundry great things could ever spring. Who likewise would imagine that an ant, a gnat, a flea, and such small creatures had feet which speedily move, a head, a heart, inward and outward senses, and prudence and judgement after their manner, although very imperfect? Who also would suppose that in these and suchlike small creatures there should be such force to pierce and enter the quick flesh, that they become not only very troublesome to men, but also to elephants and lions, whom they terrify?

Great, therefore, is our Lord and great is his wisdom, both in great things and in small.

The Prince of Physicians, although an ethnic, did sometimes wonder at the cunning workmanship which God hath wrought in a man's hand; and cried out in praise of the Maker.* What oughtst thou then, O Christian, to do, who seest that not only the bodies of men and other living creatures,

* Galen. in libr. *de partibus*.

but also the heavens, the stars, the angels, and the immortal souls of men, are made with incredible wisdom by the same most wise Creator?

CHAPTER II

THE LENGTH OF THE PRACTICAL WISDOM OF
GOD SHINETH FORTH IN THE PRESERVA-
TION OF THINGS

MOREOVER, the length of his practical wisdom appeareth in the preservation of things, as the breadth thereof in their creation. Wherefore the great and admirable wisdom of God is to be observed in the preservation and duration of created things, but especially of such as are corruptible.

First, then, if anyone will but consider how God nourisheth and causeth herbs, plants, beasts, and the bodies of men to grow, and preserveth them to the uttermost, he cannot but with astonishment wonder at God's wisdom. For with earth and water he nourisheth herbs and plants, and causeth that the nourishment doth pass from the root to the stock, and from the stock is drawn up by a certain virtue to the boughs, leaves, and fruit, so that it runneth into every part after an admirable manner. Men likewise and some beasts he nourisheth with herbs, apples, and with the flesh of beasts, and

causeth the nourishment to enter and pass through all parts of the body with such facility and delight as may seem incredible. God dealeth like a learned and gentle physician, who tempereth his medicine in such sort that the patients may receive them not only easily, but also willingly. For meats doubtless are medicines, which unless men receive often they cannot escape death. But God, our most loving and skilful physician, hath first given a taste unto meats, that they may be taken with delight: then he hath multiplied them with infinite variety to take away their irksomeness. And lastly, after divers alterations in the mouth, stomach, liver, and heart, he changeth the meat into so thin a juice, that it passeth without scission or pain through all the veins and pores of the body unto all the parts of the flesh, bones, and sinews, even when we sleep and feel it not. The philosophers wonder at the wisdom of nature when they consider these things, but what wisdom can there be in things without life, sense, and reason? Therefore not the wisdom of nature, but the wisdom of God is to be admired, who made nature, and found out the way how these marvellous things might be done. Hear the wisdom of God, speaking in the Gospel: *Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow : they labour not, neither do they spin, and God*

doth so clothe, etc.* Therefore not the wisdom of nature, but God maketh the lilies to grow, and as it were clotheth them with so comely garments, which also may be said of the nourishment and growth of all living creatures, as the Apostle witnesseth, saying: *Neither he that planteth is anything, nor he that watereth: but he that giveth the increase, God.*†

And if the wisdom of God doth feed, nourish, and preserve plants and beasts in this mortal life after so admirable a manner, think if thou canst, O my soul, how God doth feed the minds of angels and men in eternal life. For on earth we are fed with earthly meats, albeit they are seasoned with God's wisdom; but in heaven, wisdom itself is the meat and drink of those that live for ever.

Oh, happy shouldst thou be, if thou couldst thoroughly understand what it is: *God shall be all in all*;‡ what, I say, it is that God, the chief happiness, shall be to all the saints meat, drink, clothing, life and all things whatsoever. Surely thou wouldst loathe all things present, and only *mind and seek the things that are above*.§ But let us proceed.

It also resembleth a miracle, that for the preservation and continuance of man's life

* Matt. vi 28, 30.

‡ 1 Cor. xv 28.

† 1 Cor. iii 7.

§ Col. iii 2.

God hath given to very small things a very long and continual motion without intermission. Men take great pains to make the wheels of a clock run by force of weights, four and twenty hours.

How great then is the wisdom of God, who causeth the nourishing faculty to work without ceasing, so long as men, beasts, or trees do live, and the lungs and pulses to move continually seventy years and more. For of necessity the nourishing faculty must work, and the lungs and pulses must move from the first entrance into life until the end thereof. Those, therefore, that live until fourscore or ninety years of age must of necessity have their lungs and pulses move all the while. And before the flood, when men lived nine hundred years, their lungs and pulses, which are things very small and soon out of temper, wrought nine hundred years without rest or intermission. Truly they that wonder at these things and do not reverence and adore God's wisdom in them are doubtless deprived of all light of wisdom.

Moreover, albeit God's wisdom can without the labour of men and beasts, and without the ministry of the sun or other secondary causes, produce and preserve herbs and trees, so that all living creatures might have meat in readiness: yet it pleased him to use the service of secondary causes, and the

labour and industry of men and of beasts, that none might be idle, but that everyone might exercise their strength.

He would also that, among men, some should be rich and some poor, that they all might have occasion to love virtue and to be tied together in the bond of charity.

For the rich may therefore use mercy and liberality, and the poor patience and humility. The rich also need the labour of the poor to till their fields, to feed their cattle, and by divers trades to provide such things as everyone hath need of.

The poor, again, want the help of the rich, to give them money and means to provide for themselves meat, drink, clothing, and other necessities.

Neither is there any cause why the poor should complain of God's wisdom; for God, who knoweth all and loveth all, hath given to everyone what he foresaw to be most convenient for them to obtain everlasting life, as earthly physicians command some of their patients to let blood, and others to drink wine, eat flesh, and use recreation. Many poor folks, doubtless, shall now be saved, who if they had been rich had perished eternally. And although the rich may also be saved, if they seek to be rich in good works and give that willingly which they received of our common Lord, not to hide but to

bestow, yet it cannot be denied but that poverty is a safer, plainer, and shorter way to heaven than wealth. Our Heavenly Master doth not deceive us who saith: *Amen I say to you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.** And again: *Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God, and woe to you that are rich because you have your consolation.†* Neither doth the Apostle deceive us, who in his first Epistle to Timothy saith: *They that will be made rich fall into temptation and the snare of the devil and many desires unprofitable and hurtful, which drown men into destruction and perdition.‡* And what our Lord and his Apostles taught by word, they confirmed also by example, for our Lord saith of himself: *The foxes have holes, and the fowls of the air nests: but the son of man hath not where to repose his head.§* And the Apostle saith of himself and his fellow Apostles: *Until this hour we do both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are beaten with buffets, and are wanderers,||* that is, have no house of our own. Neither ought we to doubt but that the wisdom of God's Son and of his disciples chose the safest and plainest way unto life. *But because the*

* Matt. xix 23.

† 1 Tim. vi 9.

|| 1 Cor. iv 11.

† Mark vi 20, 24.

§ Luke ix 58.

*number of fools is infinite,** few choose this way willingly, but many decline from it with all their affection and power.

Lastly, the length of God's wisdom is seen, in that as it is itself eternal, so it hath engrafted in all things a most lively instinct to preserve themselves, and to prolong their life and being as long as they can. We see men, when they perceive themselves to be in danger of their lives, endeavour their utmost, and spare no cost or labour to preserve the same; we see beasts to fight and strive even above their strength with those that overmaster them, rather than they would lose their lives; we see a burning candle when it is almost out, raise up itself two or three times, and send forth a great flame, that it may seem to strive as much as it can not to go out; we see drops of water hanging sometime upon wood or stone to become round, and to hold themselves together as long as they can, lest they fall and perish; we see heavy things to ascend against nature and light things to descend, lest vacuity should happen, whereby they being from the rest of things, could not be severed preserved. But the love which God hath given to parents towards their young ones is so admirable that it may seem incredible. We see the hen feed her chickens and fast

* Eccles. i 15.

herself, and though she be weak and feeble, to fight most eagerly against kites, dogs, and foxes, and what labours and throes women willingly endure to bring their children into the world, and after up in the world, we all know. The cause of this is the counsel of God's wisdom, who to maintain this propagation as a shadow of his eternity, hath engrafted in brutes and wild beasts, and in all living creatures that have sense, a most vehement love towards their young ones.

For seeing that there are many kinds of beasts and fowls which men seek to destroy either for game as hares, bears, stags, thrushes, quails, partridges, and almost all kinds of fishes: or lest they should do hurt, as wolves, foxes, serpents, and other without number the like: many of those kinds of creatures should have perished long since, if God's wisdom had not by this love provided for their preservation and propagation.

If then the natural love of all living things to this short and troublesome life be so great, what ought our love to be to the blessed and eternal life? O blindness and folly of man! All things strive, even above their strength, to preserve this short life, which is but a shadow of eternity; and man, that hath reason, will not strive—I say not above, but only according to his strength—for the eternity of a most happy life. All things by

instinct of nature fear and eschew temporal death above all evil, and man who is endued with reason and taught by faith, doth neither fear and eschew eternal death, as he doth temporal evils.

Truly, therefore, said the preacher: *The number of fools is infinite.** And truly also said the truth in the Gospel: *How narrow is the gate and strait is the way that leadeth to life : and few there are that find it.*†

CHAPTER III

THE HEIGHT OF GOD'S PRACTICAL WISDOM IS
SEEN IN THE WORK OF OUR REDEMPTION

THE height of God's practical wisdom is seen in the work of our Redemption. *Non satiabar*, saith St Augustine; *I was not filled with thy admirable sweetness to consider the height of thy counsel touching the salvation of mankind.*‡

And surely it was a most high counsel, by the ignorance of the Cross to repair all the damages which the craft of the devil had caused by the sin of the first man; and so to repair them, that the work repaired became more beautiful than it was before the reparation.

Four evils were caused by the sin of Adam :

* Eccles. i 15.

† Matt. vii 14.

‡ *Confess.*, IX, c. 6, No. 14.

injury to God by his pride and disobedience; the punishment of him and of all mankind by the loss of God's grace, and of eternal happiness; the sorrow of the angels, whom the injury done to God and the misery fallen to man did very much displease; the triumph of the devil and of all the wicked spirits, who rejoiced to see man overcome and cast down by them.

All these evils the wisdom of God, by the mystery of the Cross, took away, and turned them to greater good, so that not without cause the Church singeth: *O felix culpa*, etc.: *O happy fault which had such a redeemer!** For if a tailor could, by putting in some other costly piece, so amend a precious new garment, rent and torn, that it should appear more beautiful and precious than it was before, it might truly be called a happy rending which gave occasion to such mending.

Adam, therefore, being waxed proud by the craft and envy of the devil, sought to be like God and broke his commandment. And so, after a sort, took unto himself God's honour.

But Christ, the second Adam, who is the Wisdom of God, *humbled himself, made obedient unto death*,† and restored unto God much greater honour, than the first Adam

* Blessing of the Paschal Candle on Holy Saturday.

† Phil. ii 8.

by his pride and disobedience had taken away. For Adam was a mere man, and if he had obeyed, it had been in a small matter. For what great matter had it been for our first parents to have abstained from the fruit of the forbidden tree, having plenty of many more excellent? Therefore their sin was the greater, in that their obedience was in a thing easy and of no labour to perform.

But Christ was God and man, and humbled himself to obey God his Father in a thing most hard and laborious, to wit, in the death of the Cross, which was full of pain and ignominy.

Wherefore, if we consider the eminency of the person and the depth of his humility and obedience, nothing can be imagined more to God's honour and glory than that humble obedience of Christ. For which cause our Lord said most truly in the Gospel: *I have glorified thee upon earth.** For truly Jesus Christ did glorify God his Father with unspeakable glory before the angels of heaven and before all the souls of the prophets and others, to whom these things were known. And if the angels at Christ's birth, for the humility of the Crib, did sing: *Glory to God in the highest,*† with much greater joy did they sing it for the humility of the Cross.

* John xvii 4.

† Luke ii 14.

Moreover, man, if he had not sinned, had obtained at most but to be equal with angels; but now by the redemption which is in Jesus Christ, mankind hath obtained, that a man being exalted above angels, sitteth at the right hand of God and is become the Lord both of angels and of men. For so of Christ writeth St Peter the Apostle in his first Epistle: *Being gone into Heaven, angels and powers and virtues being made subject to him,** and his fellow Apostle St Paul to the Philippians: *For the which thing God also hath exalted him, and hath given him a name which is above all names : that in the name of Jesus every knee bow, of the celestials, terrestrials, and infernals.*† Therefore the Son hath glorified the Father after an unspeakable manner by the humility of his Passion, and the Father hath also after an unspeakable manner glorified the Son by exalting him unto his right hand: which glorification hath in such sort redounded unto all mankind, that truly they are most ungrateful which acknowledge not so infinite a benefit, and give not God thanks therefore. Yea, not only Christ, God and man, but also his blessed Mother is exalted above all the choirs of angels, though she be not God, but a human creature. Wherefore men, having received more glory than they should have had if

* 1 Pet. iii 22.

† Phil. ii 9, 10.

the first man had not sinned, may justly cry out: *O happy fault which had such a Redeemer!*

Moreover, as the holy angels were made sorrowful for the fall of the first man, as for the grievous mishap of their younger brother, so likewise they were made glad through the copious redemption wrought by Christ. *For if there be joy in heaven before the angels, upon one sinner that doth penance, how much greater may we believe was the joy before those angels, when they saw God's justice fully satisfied by Christ, a man for mankind, and by the key of the Cross the kingdom of heaven opened to all believers?* Neither may we suspect that the holy angels did repine because God had exalted Christ a man, and the Blessed Virgin above them: for there is no envy in the angels, but they are full of most true and fervent charity. *And charity envieth not, is not puffed up,** is not sorrowful for another's good, but rejoiceth with all the righteous for their happiness no less than for her own. The Church, therefore, truly singeth: *Mary is assumed into heaven, the angels rejoice.†* It saith not, are sorrowful, but the angels rejoice to see the Virgin Mother of God exalted above the choirs of angels to the heavenly kingdom.

* 1 Cor. xiii 4.

† Alleluia and Offertory in Mass, Assumption B.V.M., and first Antiphon Vespers.

The angels know also that God hath done it most justly, who doth all things in perfect wisdom and justice, and their will is so united to God's will by the insuperable bond of love, that whatsoever pleaseth him, pleaseth them likewise, and can never displease them.

But the devil, who triumphed for a time, because he had overcome and cast down the first man, became after more sorrowful for the victory of Christ a man than he was joyful before. For by the victory of Christ it was brought to pass that now not only men as Adam was, but also women and children insult and triumph over the devil. It had been no dishonour to the devil to have been overcome by Adam in paradise, when he had no ignorance or infirmity, but was armed with original justice, which did in such sort subordinate his sensual part unto reason that it could not rebel, until his mind first rebelled against God. But for the devil to be now overcome by a mortal man that is a pilgrim, and subject to ignorance and concupiscence, is a very great dishonour. And yet he is so overcome by the grace of Christ that many have triumphed in chastity, patience, humility, and charity, although he ceaseth not daily to cast his fiery darts of temptation and persecution. And herein the height of God's wisdom is exceedingly

to be admired. For God foresaw that the contempt of temporal riches, of fleshly pleasures, and worldly honours, which are *the snares of the devil and drown men into destruction and perdition*,* was behooveful for mankind against the deceits of the devil. What therefore did he to make them forsake these things and to love their contraries, to wit, chastity, poverty, humility, patience, and contempt of the world? Himself descended from heaven, and taking the form of a servant, made this bitter medicine, which was behooveful for man that was sick, become so sweet and pleasant by his example, that many men now love fasting better than feasting, poverty than riches, virginity than wedlock, martyrdom than daintiness, to obey than to command, and to be humbled than to be exalted. For who, seeing God in shape of man, to be poor, humble, patient, continent, and, which is most marvellous, nailed to a Cross, and willingly shedding his precious blood to die for mankind, will not be encouraged to follow him?

This was the high and wonderful invention of God's wisdom, whereof Isaias prophesied, saying: *Make his inventions known among the people.*† Yet, notwithstanding, this high wisdom of God seemeth folly not only to the wise men of this world,‡ as the Apostle

* 1 Tim. vi 9. † Isa. xii 4. ‡ 1 Cor. ii 14.

saith in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, but also to carnal and sensual men, who believe in Christ, but refuse to follow the steps of Christ, whom the same Apostle calleth: *The enemies of the Cross of Christ.**

But thou, O my soul, endeavour to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the hardest stone—that is, wisdom out of folly, the wisdom of God out of the folly of the Cross. Search diligently and attentively who is he that hangeth on the Rood, and why he so hangeth; and when thou hast found it is he *who sitteth upon the Cherubims*,† *yea, who sitteth on the right hand of the Majesty in the high places*,‡ thou shalt soon understand that he hangeth not there for his offences, nor because of his weakness or the power of others, but voluntarily, through his fervent desire to satisfy God's justice for the sins of all the world, for the honour and glory of God the Father, for the eternal salvation of the elect, and, as the Apostle speaketh: *That he might present to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle.*§ And lastly for thy sake, because he loved thee, and delivered himself for thee, a sacrifice and oblation to God unto the odour of sweetness.|| When, as I say, thou shalt find these

* Phil. iii 18.

† Heb. i 3.

|| Eph. v 2.

† Ps. xcvi 1.

§ Eph. v 27.

things most true, love from the bottom of thy heart such a benefactor, seek to follow him, and begin to thirst fervently after the glory of God, and the salvation of all nations, but especially after the beauty and glory of the whole Church and thine own eternal salvation. Begin thoroughly to hate iniquity, and to thirst after purity of heart and perfect justice, that at length thou mayest also desire to be partaker of thy Lord's Cross in tribulation and affliction, that hereafter thou mayest rise with the just to glory and not with the wicked to punishment.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEPTH OF THE PRACTICAL WISDOM OF
GOD CONSISTETH IN HIS PROVIDENCE
AND PREDESTINATION

THERE remaineth the depth of God's practical wisdom, which consisteth in his providence, predestination, and judgements; for it is written: *Thy judgements are great depth.**

First, then, God's providence is very admirable, because he governeth all creatures immediately, and directeth them to their ends. *He*, saith the wise man, *hath equally care of all*,† that is, God without exception hath care of all, so that a sparrow shall not

* Ps. xxxv 7.

† Sap. vi 8.

fall upon the ground without God's providence, as our Saviour saith.* He who can number the multiplicity of things throughout the world, may in some sort be considered as partaking of God's wisdom, and as capable of ruling and governing things, universal and particular. Truly one chief Pastor may govern all the Christian world by general providence, but not by particular, which comprehendeth every Christian, and therefore he calleth many bishops to take part of the charge.

And one king may govern many provinces by general providence, but not by particular, which concerneth every subject, and therefore he hath many viceroys, deputies, and presidents. But God hath as much care of every one in particular as of all in general, and of all in general as every one in particular. *A sparrow is not forgotten of God.*† *The hairs of our head are all numbered by him, and not one of them shall perish;*‡ the young ravens being forsaken of their parents are not forsaken by God.§

How safely, therefore, mayest thou rest, my soul, in the bosom of such a Father, although thou wert in darkness, among the mouths of lions and dragons, among innumerable legions of innumerable spirits. Cleave

* Luke xii 6; Matt. x 29.

† Luke xii 6. ‡ Matt. x 30. § Ps. cxlvi 9.

therefore to him in true love, certain hope, and assured faith.

Neither doth God's providence take care only of things present and particular, but also *reacheth from end to end mightily, and disposeth all things sweetly.** For which cause God is called the *King of worlds* :† for he hath appointed the order of worlds, and disposed the succession of kingdoms, and the changes and variety of seasons from all eternity. To God nothing can happen strange, unlooked for, or unthought of: *But the cogitations of mortal men are fearful, and our providences uncertain,* as the wise man saith.‡ For of things to come we have but uncertain conjectures; but God knoweth all things to come as certainly as things past and present, and disposed in his mind before the making of the world the order and succession of all things. Therefore, our holy Mother the Church doth publicly and securely affirm that God's providence erreth not in the order and disposition of things.§

But because the reason of God's providence is most secret, *and his judgements are great*

* Wisd. viii 1, and antiphon, *O Sapientia*, December 17 Vespers.

† 1 Tim. i 17.

‡ Wisd. ix 14.

§ In the hymns *Rector Potens* and *Rerum Deus tenax vigor*, *Hominis superne conditor*, etc.

depth,* it cometh to pass that some, seeing many evils to be committed among men and left unpunished, fall to believe that either human affairs are not governed by God's providence, or else that those evils are done by the will of God. Both which opinions are wicked; but the latter is the worst, as St Augustine writeth. And such run into the downfall of these errors, who behold God's providence in part, and in part behold it not. For whereas they ought to expect the end of things, which at the Day of Judgment shall be made manifest unto all, they judge rashly before the time and are greatly deceived. Therefore the Apostle crieth out in the Epistle to the Corinthians: *Judge not before the time, until our Lord do come, who will lighten the hidden things of darkness, and will manifest the counsel of hearts.*† St Augustine declareth this by an excellent similitude: *Si quis in vermiculato pavimento*, etc.: *If one, saith he, should behold in a chequered pavement the workmanship only of one small piece thereof; he might blame the workman as ignorant of order and composition; to wit, because he seeth but one little parcel of the work, but the greatest part he seeth not. But if he saw all the parts and their coherence, he would doubtless very much commend both of the work and the workmen.*‡

* Ps. xxxv 7. † I Cor. iv 5. ‡ Aug., in l.c. No. 2.

Even so many see the wicked prosper, and the righteous punished and afflicted, but that know not what God doth reserve hereafter for the iniquity of the wicked, or for the patience of the righteous, and therefore they blaspheme with them, which in Job said: *God walketh about the poles of heaven, neither doth he consider our things,** and with others, which in Malachi say: Every one that doth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and such please him.

St Augustine useth also another similitude taken from verses. For if when one heareth an heroical verse, he should say in the beginning, or in the midst thereof, that the verse was not good, he might justly be reprehended of folly: for he should expect until all the syllables were sounded, and then he might find fault therewith if it pleased him not. Even so, they are most fond who dare discommend the most orderly providence of God, before the whole course thereof be run out.

Therefore, my soul, if thou be wise, endeavour all thou canst that evil be not done, for so doth God command thee; but why he suffereth evil to be done, leave it to his judgements, which may be secret, but cannot be unjust.

* Job xxii 14.

CHAPTER V

OF THE DEPTH OF THE MYSTERY OF PREDESTINATION AND REPROBATION

BUT although the reason of God's providence in governing human affairs is very deep, yet the reason of his eternal predestination and reprobation is deeper without comparison. For why God filleth many of the wicked with temporal goods, and leaveth their sins unpunished in this life; and again, why he suffereth many innocents to be pressed with poverty and to be unjustly afflicted, tormented, and killed, we cannot truly search out the particulars; but we may assign some probable general cause. For God often causeth the wicked to abound with temporal goods, to reward some of their good moral works, albeit he will not give them eternal life; or to allure them thereby to be converted from their sins, and be brought to the hope and desire of eternal benefits. Sometimes also he punisheth not their sins in this life because he will sufficiently punish them in hell. But the righteous he suffereth to be afflicted with poverty, ignominy, and divers other vexations, as well to purge their light sins in this life, as also to reward their patience, humility, and other virtues with greater glory in eternal life. But why

God loved Jacob and hated Esau before they did either good or evil, who can tell? And this is that which the Apostle wondereth at in his Epistle to the Romans. For they were twins, brothers born of the same father and mother, and yet God by predestination loved the one and by reprobation hated the other.* And lest, perhaps, some might say that God foresaw the good works of the one and the evil works of the other, the Apostle preventeth the answer, saying: This was done *that the purpose of God according to election might stand*. And he allegeth the words of God in Moses: *I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy.*†

Who also will not wonder that one should persevere a long time in good works, as Judas the traitor, and at the end of his life give over and perish: and another to continue a long time in evil works, as the good thief, and at the end of his life be converted and go into Paradise? But, thou wilt say, Judas betrayed Christ, and the thief confessed Christ. It is true: but could not Christ have looked on Judas, as he looked on Peter, and inspired Judas with that powerful grace which no hard heart can refuse? And could not Christ have given faith and repen-

* Malach. i 2, 3; Rom. ix 10 *sqq.*

† Rom. ix 11, 15; *cf.* Exod. xxxiii 19.

tance to both the thieves which were hanged with him, as he did to one of them: or suffer them both to die in their sins, as he suffered the one of them? Who likewise can tell the reason why God taketh away some, lest malice should change their understanding, as the wise man speaketh of Enoch,* and many he taketh not away, but suffereth them to fall from virtue to vice, and to end their days therein? What shall we say of whole nations, some whereof are very soon, others very long before they be called unto the faith, without which none can be saved? *For he that believeth not is already judged.*† And as the Apostle speaketh: *Everyone whosoever shall invoke the name of the Lord, shall be saved. How then shall they invoke in whom they have not believed? Or how shall they believe him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? But how shall they preach unless they be sent?*‡

These are, therefore, most high and deep secrets, which the eternal Father hath hidden in the depth of his wisdom, whereat the Apostle wondereth, but declareth them not, when he saith: *O depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are his judgements, and his*

* Wisd. iv 10 sqq.

† John iii 18.

‡ Rom. x 13-15.

*ways unsearchable ! For who hath known the mind of the Lord ? Or who hath been his counsellor ?** This only is lawful for us to know, that in God there is no iniquity, and that at the last day there shall be none but shall truly say: *Thou art just, O Lord, and thy judgement right.*†

Moreover, this secret is profitable to us all: for hereby it cometh to pass that the wicked shall not despair of their salvation, nor the righteous presume thereof. Good men also shall not be hopeless of the conversion of the wicked, but pray for all, and carefully seek their salvation. And again, none, how good and holy soever, shall have occasion to be proud, but *with fear and trembling work out their salvation.*‡

And thou, my soul, having considered all these things, *Labour by good works to make sure thy vocation and election,*§ as St Peter the Apostle doth admonish thee in his last Epistle. But what those good works are which make sure thy vocation and election, St John the Apostle teacheth thee when he saith: *My little children, let us not love in word nor in tongue : but in deed and truth.*|| For charity is a virtue with which none shall be damned, and without which none shall be

* Rom. xi 33, 34.

‡ Phil. ii 12.

|| 1 John iii 18.

† Ps. cxviii 137.

§ 2 Pet. i 10.

saved. And it is showed by the works, to wit, when one doth give alms to the poor, or forgive his enemies, for the true love of God and his neighbour, and not for hope of temporal reward, or for inordinate love to the creature.

And because it is not enough to begin well; *But he that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved*:* therefore the Apostle saith *Labour*, that is attentively, carefully, and diligently follow the business of your eternal salvation. And truly there is no sign more probable of God's election, than when a man, being more careful of his salvation than of any other thing, prayeth continually unto God for the gift of true repentance, true humility, perfect charity, and perseverance unto the end; and not being content with prayer only, striveth also all he can to seek and find *the kingdom of heaven and the justice thereof*,† as our Saviour doth exhort.

* Matt. x 22, xxiv 13.

† Matt. vi 33.



THE FOURTEENTH STEP
FROM THE CONSIDERATION OF
GOD'S MERCY

CHAPTER I

OF THE BREADTH OF GOD'S MERCY, WHERE-
WITH HE TAKETH AWAY OUR MISERIES

THE Holy Ghost doth in the Holy Scripture marvellously commend the mercy of God, in so much that he doubteth not to extol it above all God's works: for so singeth the prophet David: *Our Lord is sweet to all, and his commiserations are over all his works.** We shall easily discern the greatness of this divine attribute if we consider somewhat attentively the breadth, length, height, and depth thereof.

The breadth of God's mercy is seen in that he only can take away all miseries, and from all creatures he taketh away some for the love he beareth them, and not for any profit to himself. Creatures indeed can take away some miseries: as bread hunger, drink thirst, clothes nakedness, knowledge

* Ps. cxliv 9.

ignorance, and so of the rest; but no creatures can take away all miseries.

Moreover, there are some miseries the greater, the more secret and inward they are, which God only can remedy. Such are the subtle deceits of the devils, who are many, mighty, and much incensed against us. Such also are the errors of our mind and conscience, which we in ourselves see not: but oftentimes are deceived, thinking ourselves very sound, whenas indeed we are very sick.

Who can deliver us from these miseries, but only our almighty Physician? And he also doth often mercifully deliver us from them without our knowledge, for which cause we may all justly be said unkind to God, as our Lord himself doth witness when he saith: *That his heavenly Father is beneficial upon the unkind and the evil.** For we scarcely know the least part of God's benefits, and therefore we thank him not for them with such devotion and humility as we ought.

Creatures, moreover, cannot take away all miseries, but only a few: nor from all men, but from a few. God alone can take away all miseries from all, and albeit he do not so, yet there is none but is in some sort partaker of his mercy.

* Luke vi 35.

Truly, therefore, saith the prophet: *The earth is full of the mercy of the Lord.** The Church also in her prayer saith: *Deus cui proprium est misereri*, etc. O God, to whom it is proper to have mercy, etc.;† for he can take away misery properly who wanteth misery: and he can take away all miseries from all, who wanteth all misery. And that is God only, who is a pure act whose essence is happiness.

O my soul, if thou couldst conceive what the life of thy Lord and Father is, which is exalted above all misery and is happiness itself, how wouldst thou sigh from thy heart to be in the bosom thereof, that of thee also it might be said: *There shall no evil come to thee, and scourge shall not approach to thy tabernacle!*‡ But thou wilt say, if God can take away all miseries from all things, why doth he not, since he is the *Father of mercies*,§ to wit, a most merciful Father? Why are there so many miseries in mankind under the government of the Father of mercies? Why also is it said: *The earth is full of the mercy of the Lord,*|| and not, *e contra*: *The earth is full of all misery*? God truly can take away all miseries, yet he only taketh away those which his wisdom judgeth fit to be taken

* Ps. xxxii 5.

† Collect No. 2, Mass for the Dead.

‡ Ps. xc 10. § 2 Cor. i 3. || Ps. xxxii 5

away. But his wisdom judgeth it not expedient for men that all should be taken away; for it is mercy sometimes not to take away some misery that greater mercy might afterwards be showed.

The Apostle prayed thrice to our Lord that the prick of the flesh might be taken from him, and he was not heard, *because power is perfected in infirmity*.^{*} God took not from Lazarus the misery of poverty and sores, that with greater mercy he might be carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom.[†] And how should the rich exercise the works of mercy if none were poor, hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, pilgrims, and imprisoned? And if there were not temptations nor combats with devils, where were the crowns of virgins and confessors? If also there were no labours and dolours, where were the crown of patience? And if there were no persecutors, where were the crown of martyrs? Therefore it is true that in this banishment the earth is full of miseries, for sins only are great miseries; and it is also true that the earth is full of the mercy of the Lord, because the conversion of sinners, the merits of saints, and other almost infinite benefits of God, both spiritual and temporal, are nothing else but the great and continual mercies of God our Creator. Let us there-

^{*} 2 Cor. xii 7, 9.

[†] Luke xvi 19 *sqq.*

fore give thanks to our good God, that as in this pilgrimage our tribulations abound, so also by his mercy our consolation doth abound.* *Lord, thy mercy is in heaven,*† saith David. For there shall be mercy without misery, because mercy shall take away all misery whatsoever.

CHAPTER II

THE LENGTH OF THE MERCY OF GOD IS HIS
LONGANIMITY OR PATIENCE

THE length also of his mercy is longanimity or patience, which the Scripture useth to join with mercy as a part thereof. For so speaketh David: *The Lord is pitiful and merciful, long-suffering and very merciful.*‡ And again: *The Lord is pitiful and merciful, patient and very merciful.* Truly the longanimity and patience of God, our most merciful Father, towards mankind is admirable, the like whereof we find neither in masters towards their servants, nor in parents towards their children, albeit they both are men.

And first, God is long-suffering toward sinners, waiting for them with incredible patience, sometimes from their first childhood to their last old age, permitting them to

* 2 Cor. i 5. ‡ Ps. xxxv 69. ‡ Ps. cii 8.

blaspheme his name and to break his law, and in the meantime *being beneficial to them from heaven, giving rains and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness*, as the Apostle speaketh.* And what master or parent is there among men so merciful and gentle, who seeing himself a long time injured and contemned by his servant or child, would not at length put them out of his house? Yet is not the mercy of God overcome by the malice of men, *but he doth patiently, not willing that any perish, but that all return to penance*,† as St Peter affirmeth in his Epistle. And the wise man saith: *Thou hast mercy on all, O Lord, dissembling sins for repentance*.‡

Moreover, this patience seemeth yet greater in that many sinners being by God's grace brought out of the lake of misery, and from the mire of dregs,§ and of the children of darkness made the children of light, and called from the guiltiness of eternal death to the adoption of the children of God and hope of heaven: fall, notwithstanding, back again oftentimes to their former uncleanness and unthankfulness. Yet are they not forsaken by the longanimity of God, but most lovingly expected and invited to repentance; and if they truly repent, as prodigal

* Acts xiv 16.

† Wisd. xi 24.

† 2 Pet. iii 9.

§ Ps. xxxix 2.

sons, they are received by their most merciful Father to the kiss of peace and to their former dignities.* Not without cause to St Peter demanding if he should forgive his brother offending against him until seven times, did our Saviour answer: *I say not to thee until seven times, but until seventy times seven times.*†

For that course which he useth in forgiving offences, the same would he have us use also. For he hath set down no certain time for reconciliation, but the term of this life. As long as a sinner liveth, although it be an hundred years or more, and often falleth back, yet is he received and pardoned by his most merciful Father. For there is no repentance too late with the mercy of God, so it be truly from a contrite heart.‡ Yet none ought to abuse God's mercy and defer their conversion from day to day, because none knoweth at what day or in what hour he shall die, and appear before the tribunal of the most just judge. Yea, rather all ought by this so great and incredible goodness of God to come unto repentance; for if God be so merciful to sinners that often fall, what will he be to those that, having once tasted the sweetness of his grace, can never after by any temptation be separated from it!

* Luke xv 11 *sqq.*

† Matt. xviii 21, 22.

‡ Ps. l 19.

But there is also another longanimity of God exceeding amiable and admirable, which he useth in suffering the offences of the righteous. For albeit God, of his infinite mercy, of slaves hath made us his children and friends, and of persons condemned to eternal death, heirs of his kingdom, yet such is our ingratitude that daily we render him evil for good. For if St James the Apostle said: *In many things we all offend*,* what may we say, which are so far from the Apostle's perfection? Behold we speak in prayer to God, and on the sudden we are carried away by the imagination to think of other things, and to turn, as it were, our backs to God.

What master in the world would suffer his servants which stand in his presence and speak to him, to turn away on the sudden, and neglecting him to prattle with their fellow-servants? What shall I say of idle words? Of vain thoughts? Of fruitless works? Of excess in eating, drinking, sleeping, and playing? Of negligence in holy things? Of omission of brotherly correction? And of innumerable other such-like, wherein we daily all offend? And yet our God *is sweet and mild, and of much mercy to all that invoke him*.† He suffereth these follies and rude incivilities, as I may call

* Jas. iii 2.

† Ps. lxxxv 5.

them, in his children, which truly men will not suffer in men. This St Augustine noteth in his treatise upon the eighty-fifth psalm, expounding these words: *O Lord, thou art sweet and mild* ; where he bewaileth man's infirmity concerning the distractions of his mind in time of prayer, and magnifieth the mercy of God in suffering so many injuries of his servants.* *But he knoweth whereof we are made*,† and therefore dealeth with us as a mother doth with her child, whom she cherisheth and nourisheth although perhaps it strike her. But albeit God suffereth so many of our offences without breaking the bond of love, or depriving us of the right of our inheritance, yet will he not leave them unpunished at the Day of Judgement, when-as we must render to him an account for our idle words,‡ unless he find them purged before by tears, prayers, or some other kind of satisfaction.

And lest thou, my soul, perhaps mayest think these offences light, and therefore deceive thyself and neglect to amend them, hear what St Bonaventura writeth in the life of St Francis, a man most surely illuminated by the divine light: *Graviter se putabat offendere*, etc. Greatly, saith he, *did he think he offended, if being at his prayers his*

* St Aug., *Enarr. in Ps. LXXXV*, No. 7.

† Ps. cii 14.

‡ Matt. xii 36.

*mind wandered after vain phantasies. When any such thing happened he spared not confession, but forthwith made satisfaction. This course he practised so often that seldom was he troubled with those molestations. Once in a time of Lent he had made a little basket, to pass away some short vacation without being altogether unoccupied; which coming to his mind when he said his hours, did somewhat distract it: wherefore being moved with zeal of spirit, he burned the basket, saying, I will sacrifice it to God, whose sacrifice is hindered.**

Therefore distraction of mind in time of prayer and praising God is not so small an offence as many imagine; but great is the mercy and longanimity of God our Father, in that he is no more angry, and presently punisheth us therefore.

CHAPTER III

THE HEIGHT OF THE MERCY OF GOD IS KNOWN
FROM THE CAUSE MOVING HIM

NEXT followeth the height of God's mercy, which is taken from the cause moving God to mercy. And truly it is most high, and exalted above all the heavens according to that of the Psalms: *Lord, thy mercy is in*

* *Vita S Franc.*, c. 10, Nos. 7, 8.

heaven. And: Mercy shall be built up for ever in the heavens.†*

Some men have mercy of other men because they need their help; and this indeed is the lowest degree of mercy, for it goeth not beyond private commodity, after which manner we also have compassion of our horses, dogs, and cattle.

Others have mercy by reason of consanguinity of friendship, to wit, because they are their children, brothers, familiars, or friends, and this degree is a little higher, and beginneth to have the form of a virtue.

Lastly, others have mercy because they are their neighbours, to wit, men as they are, made by the same God and of the same mould. And therefore they respect not whether they be their friends or enemies, good or evil, countrymen or strangers, but they take compassion of all whom they know created according to God's image, and this is the highest degree of mercy to which mortal men can ascend.

But God hath mercy upon all things, because they are his creatures, and especially upon men, because they are his images. And more especially upon the righteous, because they are his children, heirs of his kingdom, and co-heirs of his only begotten Son.

* Ps. xxxv 6.

† Ps. lxxxviii 3.

But if thou askest why God created the world, why he made man to his likeness, why he justifieth the wicked and adopteth them to be his children and heirs of his kingdom, nothing can be answered, but because he so would. And why he would so, but because he is good: for goodness is liberal and doth willingly bestow itself.

Mercy, therefore, is built up in heaven,* and from a most high habitation, to wit, from the heart of the highest, she descended to the earth and filled it, as was foretold by the prophet: *The earth is full of the mercy of our Lord.*† God, therefore, findeth in himself wherewith to bestow his mercy upon us: he findeth in us wherewith to punish.

Lift up now, my soul, the eyes of thy mind to that most high fountain of mercy; consider the absolute purity thereof, not mixed with any intention of private commodity. And when thou hearest the Master of all exhorting and saying: *Be ye therefore merciful, as also your Father is merciful,*‡ endeavour all thou canst not only to have compassion of thy fellow-servants, but to have it with that pure affection wherewith thy heavenly Father hath compassion of us. If thou forgivest him who diminisheth or calumniateth thee, forgive him with a true

* Ps. lxxxviii 2.

† Ps. xxxii 5.

‡ Luke vi 36.

heart, and commit to perpetual forgetfulness every offence: for our Father forgetteth our offences, as the prophet Ezechiel writeth;* and: *As far as the east is distant from the west, doth he make our iniquities far from us,*† as David speaketh, to wit, that they may no more be potent to harm us. If thou givest an alms to the poor, make account thou dost rather receive than give, because *he lendeth to the Lord who hath mercy on the poor.*‡ Give it therefore with humility and reverence, not as an alms to the poor, but as a gift to a prince. If thou sufferest any discommodity to benefit thy poor neighbour, think yet how far thou comest short of thy Lord, who to benefit thee gave his blood and life. So shalt thou, without hope of earthly reward, and without any motion of vainglory, merely for the love of God and thy neighbour, profit in the virtue of mercy.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEPTH OF GOD'S MERCY IS SEEN IN THE EFFECTS THEREOF

IT remaineth that we consider the depth of God's mercy. For as the height thereof appeareth chiefly in the cause, so the depth thereof is seen especially in the effect.

* Ezech. xviii 22, 24.

† Ps. cii 12.

‡ Prov. xix 17.

That mercy, therefore, is not said to be deep, but rather shallow and superficial which descendeth to words only; that deeper which comforteth the needy not only with words, but also with deeds; that most deep, which not only with words and deeds comforteth them, but also endureth labours and dolours for their sakes. Our God, therefore, whose mercy is infinite, hath been merciful unto us after all these manners. For first he sent us letters of comfort, to wit, the Holy Scriptures, whereof the Machabees speak: *We have for our comfort the holy books, that are in our hands.** Neither doth he speak to us by letters only, but also by the sermons of preachers, which are legates of Christ for our reconciliation,† and by inward inspirations promising us his helps and protection. *I will hear, saith David, what the Lord God will speak in me, because he will speak peace upon his people, and upon his saints and upon them that are converted to the heart.‡*

Secondly, the benefits of God's mercies against our manifold miseries, both spiritual and temporal, are so many that they cannot be numbered. For everywhere *he crowneth us in mercy and commiserations,§* that is, he compasseth us about everywhere with the benefits of his mercy.

* 1 Mach. xii 9.

‡ Ps. lxxxiv 9.

† 2 Cor. v 19, 20.

§ Ps. cii 4.

Thirdly, God's mercy descended by the mystery of the holy Incarnation to labours and dolours, to hunger and thirst, to ignominy and reproaches, to stripes and wounds, and to the death of the Cross to redeem us from our sins, and from eternal death due unto us therefor. Is there any greater depth to which God's mercy did descend? Yes, surely: for he did all these things not of duty, but out of love. *He was offered, saith the prophet, because himself would.* For who compelled the Son of God, who thought it no robbery himself to be equal to the Father, but he exinanited himself, taking the form of a servant.† To be made poor for us, that by his poverty we might be rich.‡ To be humbled unto death, even the death of the Cross, to exalt us.§* Truly love only compelled him, mercy only constrained him.

It also descendeth yet further, for he would in the work of our salvation bestow on us honour and glory. That division which the angels made seemed very fit: *Glory in the highest to God, and in earth peace,*|| honour be to God, and profit to men; but God's mercy would have all the profit to be ours, and part of the glory to be his and part of it to be ours. For he would give us his

* Isa. liii 7.

† Phil. ii 7.

‡ 2 Cor. viii 9.

§ Phil. ii 8.

|| Luke ii 14.

grace, whereby we might work out our salvation. Not that the merit of Christ sufficed not, but to communicate with us the praise and glory of our own salvation. Whereupon it is said in the Gospel: *Pay them their hire.** And the Apostle glorifieth, saying: *There is laid up for me a crown of justice.*†

Lastly, God's mercy is most deep toward men, especially toward the righteous and them that fear God, because it exceedeth the affection of fathers and mothers, which is the greatest we can find on earth. Hear the prophet Isaias: *Can a woman forget her infant, that she will not have pity on the son of her womb? And if she should forget, yet will I not forget thee.*‡ Hear David: *As a father hath compassion of his children, so hath the Lord compassion on them that fear him.*§ And lest thou mightst say, there are some parents whose love sometime changeth into hatred, David said further of God's mercy and love toward his children: *The mercy of our Lord from everlasting upon them that fear him;*|| of which continuance the Apostle also certifieth us in his last Epistle to the Corinthians, where he calleth God: *The Father of mercies and God of all consolation.*¶ God,

* Matt. xx 8.

‡ Isa. xlix 15.

|| Ps. cii 17.

† 2 Tim. iv 8.

§ Ps. cii 13.

¶ 2 Cor. i 3.

therefore, is not only a Father to those that fear him, but a most merciful Father ever ready to comfort us: for he taketh away such miseries and afflictions from his children as he judgeth expedient to be taken from them, and therein he showeth himself to be the *Father of mercies*; and he giveth them unspeakable comfort to suffer those which he judgeth not expedient for them to be taken away, and therein he showeth himself to be the *God of all consolation*. But the Apostle saith of *all consolation* for two causes:

First, because God comforteth those that are his, in all kinds of tribulation, which truly the world cannot do, for oftentimes it understandeth not the causes of tribulations, even as Job's friends were *heavy comforters*, as he called them, because they knew not the cause of his grief, and therefore applied the remedy where they ought not;* or else for that the tribulation is sometimes so great, that no earthly consolation can equal it. But God the almighty and most skilful Physician, can cure every infirmity, and therefore the Apostle saith, *who doth comfort us in all our tribulations*.† Moreover, he is called the *God of all consolation*, because he comforteth so fully that it were better to suffer tribulations with such a comforter than to want them both together, as it hap-

* Job xvi 2 *sqq.*

† 2 Cor. i 4.

pened to a young man called Theodorus, a confessor in the persecution of Julian the Apostate, who, being tortured ten hours together with such cruelty and change of executioners as in no age is reported the like, sung notwithstanding all that while with great joy the Psalms of David, and when it was commanded he should be let down, he began to be sorrowful, because of the great comfort he received by the presence of an angel whilst he was in torturing, as Rufinus writeth.* Wherefore it is no marvel if the Apostle say: *I am replenished with consolation, I do exceedingly abound in joy in all our tribulation.*† And in the beginning of his Epistle: *Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we also may be able to comfort them that are in all distress.*‡

What thinkest thou, O my soul, of this so ample, continual, pure, and infinite mercy of our Lord, who needeth nothing of ours, and yet out of the abundance of his love is so careful of his servants, as if of them depended all his happiness? What thanks therefore wilt thou give him? What canst thou ever do, not to be ungrateful to so great mercy? Seek at least all thou canst, to please him. And because it is written: *Be ye merciful as also your Father is merciful,*§

* *Rufin. Hist. Eccles.* x, c. 36.

† 2 Cor. vii 4. ‡ 2 Cor. i 4. § Luke vi 36.

and: *Have mercy on thine own soul, pleasing God.** Begin diligently first to find out the miseries of thy soul, for the miseries of the body are plain to the eye, so that it is needless to put a man in mind of them: for if the body be but one day without meat and drink, or one night without sleep, or by a fall or wound be hurt, it presently crieth out and complaineth, and is with great care looked unto. But the soul fasteth whole weeks from her meat, and is sick with wounds, or perhaps dead, and none taketh care or compassion of her. Visit therefore thy soul often; examine all her powers, whether they be well and profit in the knowledge and love of true happiness, or whether they be sick with ignorance or languish with divers desires. Also whether the mind be blinded with malice, or the will infected with envy and pride. And if thou find any such thing, cry unto our Lord: *Have mercy upon me, because I am weak.*† Seek spiritual physicians and apply fit remedies. Take compassion likewise of other souls, whereof an infinite number perish, although Christ died for them.

O my soul, if thou didst truly know the price of souls, to wit, the precious blood of the Son of God, and also the great slaughter which is made of them by the infernal

* Eccli. xxx 24.

† Ps. vi 3.

ASCENT OF THE MIND TO GOD

wolves and roaring lions, the devils; surely thou couldst not but from thy heart take pity on them, and by thy prayers to God, and by all other means seek to deliver them.

Lastly also take compassion on the corporal necessities of thy neighbours, *not in word and tongue only, but in deed and truth*;^{*} having in mind the saying of our Lord: *Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.*[†]

* 1 John iii 18.

† Matt. v 7.



THE FIFTEENTH STEP

*FROM THE CONSIDERATION OF THE
GREATNESS OF GOD'S JUSTICE,
BY THE SIMILITUDE OF A COR-
PORAL QUANTITY*

CHAPTER I

THE BREADTH OF GOD'S JUSTICE IS UNIVERSAL
JUSTICE

GOD'S justice in Holy Scripture is taken in four ways: first for justice in general, which containeth all virtues and is the same with sanctity or probity. So in the Psalms: *The Lord is just in all his ways and holy in all his works.**

Secondly, for truth or fidelity, so in another psalm: *That thou mayest be justified in thy words.*†

Thirdly, for justice distributing rewards; so in the last Epistle to Timothy: *There is laid up for me a crown of justice, which the Lord will render to me in that day, a just judge.*‡

* Ps. cxliv 17.

† Ps. l 6.

‡ 2 Tim. iv 8.

Lastly, for justice punishing sin; so in another psalm: *He shall rain snares upon sinners, fire and brimstone and blast of storms, the portion of their cup, because the Lord is just and hath loved justice.**

The greatness, therefore, of God's justice will appear to us, if we consider the breadth thereof in general; the length thereof, to wit, his truth and fidelity, the height thereof, distributing rewards in heaven, and the depth thereof, punishing the wicked eternally in hell.

And to begin from the breadth. That is called justice in general among men, which disposeth a man to behave himself well in all actions according to all laws. And in that all virtues, as well theological as moral, are included. There is also another virtue called charity, which containeth all virtues in her bosom, and commandeth and directeth all acts of virtue to the last end. Which, although it be a particular theological virtue, yet it may truly likewise be called justice in general. For it disposeth a man to behave himself well towards God and his neighbour, and in so doing he fulfilleth all laws. So speaketh the Apostle: *Love worketh no evil; and: He that loveth hath fulfilled the Law; and: Love is the fulness of the Law.†* St Augustine also, in his book of Nature and

* Ps. x 7, 8.

† Rom. xiii 8, 10.

Grace, saith: *Unperfect charity is unperfect justice, charity increased is justice increased: great charity is great justice, perfect charity is perfect justice.**

Moreover, in God are all virtues without any imperfection, and in lieu of them, which may presuppose imperfection, there is something much better and more excellent: wherefore no goodness lacketh in him, nay, rather the goodness and holiness of him is immeasurable, for which cause he deserveth to be called *The only good, and only holy.†* Faith, therefore, is not in God a theological virtue, because faith is *of those things which are not seen.‡* But God seeth all things. Neither is there hope in God, because hope is an expectation of things to come; but God expecteth nothing, for he possesseth all things from eternity. Neither is there in God repentance for sin, because God cannot sin. Nor humility, for humility keepeth a man that he ascend not vainly above himself, but continue in his estate, but God hath nothing above himself to which he may seek to ascend, because he is most high. Yet charity, the queen of virtues, is in God most ample and truly infinite. For he loveth himself infinitely, because himself only perfectly knoweth the infinite goodness of

* *De nat. et grat.*, c. 70, No. 84.

† *Matt. xix 17.*

‡ *Heb. xi 1.*

his essence. He loveth also all things he hath made, for so speaketh the wise man: *Thou lovest all things that are and hatest nothing of those which thou hast made.** For God by his wisdom knoweth how to separate evil from good, to wit, defect from nature, even in the devils and in the most wicked, and he loveth nature which he hath made, and hateth defect which he made not. Furthermore, there is such true charity in God, that himself would be called Charity, as St John speaketh when he saith: *God is charity.*† But our love, being compared with God's love, is exceeding small: for many things we love not, because we know them not; many things also which we know we love not, because we discern not in them good from evil. Many good things also we love not well, and therefore not with true charity, because we are naughty and follow rather lust than love. And we love God imperfectly, not only because we love him not so much as his goodness doth deserve, which neither the angels do, but also because we love him less than we ought, and less also than we might, if we did with more attention and diligence give ourselves to prayer and meditation.

This queen of virtues in the Lord of virtues is accompanied with singular magni-

* Wisd. xi 25.

† 1 John iv 16.

ficence, infinite liberality, incredible benignity and humility, admirable patience and longanimity, more than paternal piety and gentleness, everlasting truth and fidelity, perfect and most unchangeable justice, and most unspotted sanctity, so that *the stars are not clean in his sight*;^{*} and the Seraphims being astonished cry: *Holy, Holy, Holy, the Lord God of Hosts.*[†]

O my soul, if thou didst consider these things attentively, with what fear and trembling wouldst thou serve God in thy devotion and prayers! And especially at the holy Altar with what reverence and humility wouldst thou offer up to the eternal Father his only begotten Son in the sight of angels, for the health of the quick and the dead!

CHAPTER II

THE LENGTH OF GOD'S JUSTICE DISCOVERETH
ITSELF BY THE TRUTH AND FIDELITY
THEREOF

BUT let us go on. The length of God's justice is manifested by the truth and fidelity thereof.

Our Lord is faithful in all his words,[‡] saith the prophet. That is, the promises of God, which were declared many ages since by the

* Job xxv 5.

† Isa. vi 3.

‡ Ps. cxliv 13.

prophets, never were, nor shall be frustrate, but more firm and stable than heaven and earth. For so saith our Lord: *It is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fall.** And our Lord meaneth by the law, not only the truth of his commandments, but also of all the promises; for whatsoever he hath commanded must be observed, or punishment followeth; and whatsoever he hath promised is by eternal truth established and performed. Whereupon he also saith: *Heaven and earth shall pass, but my words shall not pass.*† And Isaias: *The word of our Lord abideth for ever;*‡ and David: *All his commandments are faithful, confirmed for ever and ever;*§ and the Apostle: *But God is true and every man a liar;*|| and: *It is impossible for God to lie.*¶ The reason of which sayings is, because being Wisdom he cannot be deceived: being Goodness, he cannot deceive: and being Omnipotence he cannot fail. But men, although they be wise, good, and mighty, may be deceived and deceive, because they neither know all things, nor can they perform all things as they will. They also that are good when they promise may soon after become evil and not fulfil their promise.

* Luke xvi 17.

‡ Isa. xl 8.

|| Rom. iii 4.

† Matt. xxiv 35.

§ Ps. cx 8.

¶ Heb. vi 18.

Therefore, if thou be wise, my soul, trust only in God; cleave only to him; and upon him cast all thy care.* Walk thou carefully with thy Lord God, and he will be careful of thee. Take heed all thou canst, lest thou offend his justice, and his mercy will always so defend thee, that thou shalt not need to know what man or devil can do to thee.

CHAPTER III

THE HEIGHT OF GOD'S JUSTICE IS SEEN IN THE
BESTOWAL OF THE HEAVENLY REWARD

THE height of God's justice is seen in giving the reward of heaven, which God, as the highest and most just judge, hath prepared for them who have lived righteously.

And first we shall discern the greatness of his justice, if we compare God as a judge with men that are judges: and then if we compare rewards with rewards, to wit, the rewards which God will give with those which men use to give.

Men that are judges, whether princes or prelates, and have under them subjects or servants, for the most part give not for many causes just rewards to those that deserve them. For either they cannot, through want of ability, give all according to their deserts;

* 1 Pet. v 7.

or they know not all their deserts, or they know not their true worth which dependeth upon the sincerity and affection of their minds: or through covetousness and malice, or some other perverse inclination, they will not justly reward their just labours: or lastly, they are either prevented by death before they can pay the recompense which they owe; or they to whom it is due depart out of this life before they begin to taste the fruits of their travails. But God giveth the righteous not only just rewards for their good works, but also above their deserts. For what desert can be more base and obscure than to give a cup of cold water to one that is athirst? And yet for it also hath God promised a reward.* And of the large rewards which our Lord hath promised, St Luke writeth: *Good measure, and pressed down, and shaken together and running over, shall they give into your bosom.*† Neither is it to be feared that God should want anything to give for reward unto the righteous, since he is the Lord of all things, and can by his word only increase and multiply them without end.

Nor is it to be doubted, lest perhaps he be deceived in the true number and value of their deserts, since he is most wise and beholdeth all things, searching the hearts

* Matt. x 42.

† Luke vi 38.

and reins of his well-deserving servants to see with what mind, intuition, zeal, and diligence they do all things. Neither may it be thought that God hath an ill meaning to defraud his children and servants of their due recompense, because he is faithful in all his words.

Lastly, neither can he die, because he is more immortal than anything whatsoever; so that there is no danger left by prevention of death that they should be thereof deprived.

Certain therefore it is that all the good works of the righteous are with justice rewarded by God. Wherefore it is most safe to have to do with God in matter of labour and reward, and dangerous and fond to trust in men and to expect from them true recompense for desert.

Let us now compare rewards with rewards, things celestial and divine, with things terrestrial and human. What, I pray you, can men render to those who labour all day, watch all night, and hazard their lives for them in battle? O blindness of men! What can they render but small, base, and abject things, which shall continue but a short time? But God rendereth great, high, and eternal things; yet are the other desired and these contemned. St John Chrysostom compareth the palaces, cities, and kingdoms of this world, which men so admire, unto

houses of clay which children make with great labour: and what though these little cottages and small buildings be made by the children with great labour, yet by those that are elder, are they laughed at:★ and, oftentimes when the father or master seeth his children to neglect their books, and give themselves too much to those trifles, he throweth down all with his foot, what with great care they had been a long time making. Even so the great palaces, towers, castles, towns, cities, and kingdoms of mortal men, are but as houses of clay, in comparison of celestial and eternal riches, and are laughed at by the blessed angels, which behold them from above; and oftentimes they are by our heavenly Father and Master overthrown in a moment, that we may thereby understand how vain and of no moment all these things are. Which albeit few do now observe, yet at the Day of Judgement all shall see, whenas the seeing thereof will little avail them. St Hilary, in his commentary on the tenth chapter of St Matthew, saith: *that the Day of Judgement will reveal how all these things were vain.*†

But let us declare somewhat more particularly what these heavenly rewards are, which many now contemn in respect of earthly rewards.

★ St John Chrys., *Hom. XXIV in Matt*

† *Commentar. in Matt. X, No. 16.*

First, in the kingdom of heaven, there shall be most, or rather all good things that can be desired: for all that live there shall be happy, and happiness is defined to be, a heap of all good things perfectly gathered together. Therefore the goods of the mind shall be there, to wit, beauty, health, and strength. And external goods, to wit, wealth, pleasure, and glory.

Moreover, all these things shall be in a most high, perfect, and excellent degree. For God, who hath showed his power in creating the world of nothing, and his wisdom in the order and government thereof; and his love and goodness in the redemption of mankind by the mystery of the Incarnation and Passion of his Son; will then show the splendour of his glory and bountifulness of his liberality in rewarding with palms and crowns those which have triumphed over their enemy the devil. And there shall wisdom be seen not in her creatures only, but in herself who is the very cause of causes and the first and highest truth, through which most beautiful vision the souls of saints shall shine so bright that St John speaking of that future glory saith: *We shall be like unto him, because we shall see him as he is.** From this highest wisdom shall proceed charity, the queen of virtues, and so fervent that they shall always

* 1 John iii 2.

adhere unto God in such sort that they neither can nor will be separated from him.

So then the soul with all her powers shall remain in a most happy estate, and the body shall shine as the sun, as our Lord himself doth witness, saying: then the just shall shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. And this shall be the beauty thereof, the health thereof shall be immortality and the strength impassibility. Lastly, that which is now a natural body shall then be a spiritual body,* that is to say, so obedient to the spirit, that it shall exceed the winds in agility and penetrate the walls through subtlety.

Moreover, their wealth there shall be to want nothing, because with God and in God they shall possess all things, for *over all his goods shall he appoint them.*† Of their pleasure what shall I say, since it is written: *They shall be inebriated with the plenty of thy house: and with the torrent of thy pleasure thou shalt make them drink?*‡ What mind can conceive how great pleasure it is to enjoy the chief happiness? To see beauty itself? To taste sweetness itself? To enter into the joy of our Lord, that is, to be partakers of that pleasure which maketh God happy? The honour and glory of saints exceedeth

* 1 Cor. xv 44.

† Matt. xxiv 47.

‡ Ps. xxxv 9.

all eloquence. For amidst the theatre of the whole world, of all men and angels, the saints shall be praised by God, and as champions crowned, and which is the highest honour of all, they shall be placed in Christ's throne, as partners of his kingdom. For so we read in the Apocalypse: *He that shall overcome, I will give him to sit with me in my throne, as I also have overcome, and have sitten with my Father in his throne.** At this height of honour the prophet wondered when he said: *But to me thy friends, O God, are become honourable exceedingly, their principality is exceedingly strengthened.*†

And now, if to this multiplicity and excellency of good things we add eternity as an unspeakable adjunct, who can conceive the greatness of this heavenly felicity? And yet what we now cannot conceive in thought, we shall prove in deed, if by living *piously, righteously, and soberly*,‡ we shall at length arrive into that happy country. For those goods indeed shall continue for ever, which now with momentary labours Christ's servants purchase by his grace.

What sayest thou, O my soul, to these things? Hadst thou rather imitate the sports of children in making houses of clay, than enjoy an everlasting kingdom? Hadst

* Apoc. iii 21.

† Ps. cxxxviii 17.

‡ Tit. ii 12.

thou rather, which I abhor to think, be delighted with the pleasures of beasts, than come to the ineffable delights of angels? Let thy mercy, O Lord, avert this from the soul of thy servant. Rather *pierce my flesh with thy fear*,* and let the obedience of thy law be more sweet to me than honey or the honey-comb,† that *crucifying my flesh with the vices and concupiscences thereof*,‡ I may aspire to the spiritual and eternal pleasures of thy Paradise. Grant to thy servant, O Lord, to follow the steps of thy Christ,§ *who being meek and humble of heart*,|| *when he was reviled did not revile, when he suffered, he threatened not*.¶ Grant that I may live *soberly, righteously, and piously in this world*,** that with some confidence I may expect *the blessed hope and advent of the glory of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ*.**

CHAPTER IV

OF THE DEPTH OF GOD'S JUSTICE, BY WHICH
HE HATH PREPARED EVERLASTING PUNISH-
MENT FOR SINNERS

IT remaineth that we consider the justice
which God will use in punishing sinners in

* Ps. cxviii 120.

† Gal. v 24.

|| Matt. xi 29.

** Tit. ii 12, 13.

† Ps. xviii 11.

§ 1 Pet. ii 21.

¶ 1 Pet. ii 23.

the uttermost depths of hell. Wherefore if we mark with attention and diligence we shall indeed understand that it is most true which the Apostle teacheth in his Epistle to the Hebrews: *It is horrible to fall into the hands of the living God.**

For, to follow that method we observed regarding justice rewarding the merits of the saints, God the just judge will punish all sins though never so small, as, for example, an idle word, for so we read in the Gospel: *Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall render an account for it in the Day of Judgement.*† Men truly leave many offences unpunished, either because the offenders resist or fly away; or because they know not whether they be done or not, or perhaps not sufficiently proved by witnesses whether they be done or not; or else because they will not punish them, being either corrupted with bribes, oppressed with favours, or depraved with their own malice. But God is almighty, therefore none can resist his power;‡ he is everywhere, therefore nothing can be hidden from his sight: *Whither shall I go, saith David, from thy Spirit, and whither shall I flee from thy face? If I shall ascend into heaven, thou art there; if I descend into hell, thou art present;*§ he is most wise, and

* Heb. x 31.

† Matt. xii 36.

‡ Ps. lxxv 8; Rom. ix 19.

§ Ps. cxxxviii 7, 8.

therefore knoweth everything, though never so secretly hidden in the heart. Neither doth he need witnesses to prove offences, since men's consciences shall be against them as a thousand witnesses.

Lastly, no bribes nor favours can corrupt his justice, since he wanteth no goods of ours.* Certain therefore it is that no sin whatsoever can escape God's justice, unless it be first purged by repentance. For as his mercy in this life is great in pardoning, so his justice after this life will be severe in punishing. Of the time of this life the prophet Isaias speaketh: *In time acceptable have I heard thee and in the day of salvation have I holpen thee.*† Which the Apostle expounding in his last Epistle to the Corinthians saith: *Behold now is the time acceptable, behold now the day of salvation.*‡ Of the time to come after this life, the prophet Sophonias crieth out: *That day a day of wrath, a day of tribulation and distress, a day of calamity and misery, a day of darkness and mist, a day of cloud and whirlwind, a day of the trumpet and sound.*§

Neither shall all sins be punished only, but so horribly punished that scarcely can any living man imagine it. For *as no eye hath seen, nor ear hath heard, nor heart of*

* Ps. xv 2.

‡ 2 Cor. vi 2.

† Isa. xlix 8.

§ Sophon. i 15, 16.

*man conceived what God hath prepared for those that love him;** so no eye hath seen, nor ear hath heard, nor heart of man conceived what God hath prepared for those that hate him. The punishments of sinners in hell shall be very many, very great, and very pure, to wit, mixed with no comforts, and, which doth infinitely increase their misery, everlasting. They shall be very many, I say, because every power of the soul and every sense of the body shall be tormented. Weigh the words of the highest judge's sentence, set down in the Gospel: *Get ye away from me, you cursed, into fire everlasting.†* *Get ye away*, saith he—that is, depart ye from the company of the blessed, being for ever deprived of the sight of God, which is the highest essential happiness and best end for which ye were created. *You cursed*, that is, hope not hereafter for any benediction, for ye are deprived of the life of grace and all hope of salvation; the water of wisdom and dew of divine inspiration shall not hereafter rain upon you; the beams of heavenly light shall not hereafter shine upon you: neither the grace of repentance, nor the flower of charity, nor the fruits of good works shall grow in you. *The Orient from on high‡* shall never from henceforth visit you.

* 1 Cor. ii 9.

† Matt. xxv 41.

‡ Luke i 78.

Neither shall ye only lose spiritual and eternal goods, but also corporal and temporal: ye shall have no riches, no delights, no comforts; but shall be like the fig-tree, which being cursed by me withered presently from the root all over.* *Into fire*, that is, into the furnace of burning and unquenchable fire,† which shall not consume one member alone, but all the members together with horrible punishment. *Everlasting*, that is, into a fire which is blown by the breath of the Almighty, and therefore needeth no fuel to make it always to burn, that as your fault shall still remain, so your punishment shall for ever endure. Therefore the prophet Isaias most truly exclaimeth: *Which of you can dwell with devouring fire? Which of you shall dwell with everlasting heats?‡* As if he should say, there is none that can patiently endure it, but with impatience, indignation, and desperation they are compelled to bear it against their wills: and he addeth: *their worm doth not die and fire is not extinguished:§* which words our Lord repeateth often in St Mark.|| For there shall be the worm of conscience, and remembrance of this life, wherein they might easily, if they would, have escaped their

* Matt. xxi 19.

† Matt. xiii 42.

‡ Isa. xxxiii 14.

§ Isa. lxvi 24.

|| Mark ix 43, 45, 47.

punishments and obtained eternal joys. And lest some might think that the damned receive some comfort by walking or removing from place to place, hear what our Lord himself saith: *Bind his hands and feet and cast him into utter darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.** Therefore those wretches having their hands and feet bound eternally, shall always lie in the same place without the light of the sun, moon, or stars, burning in flames of fire, weeping, tormenting, and gnashing their teeth through rage and desperation. Neither shall they only suffer most grievous pains in hell, into which full horrible place they shall be thrust down, but also extreme want, disgrace, ignominy, and confusion. For in a moment they shall lose their palaces, fields, vineyards, cattle, clothes, gold, silver, and precious stones, and be brought to such misery that with the rich glutton they shall desire a drop of cold water, and shall not be heard.† Moreover, these proud and vainglorious men who in this life would suffer no disgrace, but preferred their honour and estimation before all things whatsoever, shall in that theatre of all mankind and of all the angels—than the which a greater never was nor shall be—see all their offences revealed, although they were done in darkness, and kept in the

* Matt. xxii 13.

† Luke xvi 24.

closet of their hearts, as treason, thefts, incests, sacrilege, and the like. For, as the Apostle saith in his first Epistle to the Corinthians: *When our Lord shall come to judge the world, he will lighten the hidden things of darkness, and will manifest the counsels of the hearts, and then the praise shall be to every man of God,*^{*} and without doubt the dispraise shall also be to every wicked and unrighteous man of God. But the disgrace and confusion of the wicked in that theatre shall be so great that St Basil in his exposition of the three-and-thirtieth psalm doubteth not to say: *That it shall be the greatest of all punishments,* especially to hypocrites, and to the proud and vainglorious, which accounted honour as a god, or rather as an idol, in this world.[†]

But if these things which we have said of the loss of all goods both celestial and terrestrial and of most unsufferable dolours, ignominies, and disgraces, were to have end, or at least some kind of comfort or mitigation, as all miseries in this life have, they might in some sort be thought tolerable; but since it is most certain and undoubted that as the happiness of the blessed shall continue for ever without mixture of misery, so likewise shall the unhappiness of the damned continue for ever without mixture of comfort.

* 1 Cor. iv 5.

† In Ps. XXXIII.

Truly therefore they are most blind and foolish which endeavour not all they may, through any tribulations, dangers, infamy, and death, which the Apostle calleth momentary and light,* to come to the kingdom of heaven and the happiness thereof.

CHAPTER V

WHY THE PUNISHMENT OF THE DAMNED SHALL BE EVERLASTING

AND if perhaps anyone wonder why God, who is most merciful, hath appointed such terrible and continual punishments for men's sins, which are soon passed over and seem not to be so great, let him hear St Augustine in his books of the City of God. *Who-soever, saith he, thinketh this condemnation too rigorous or unjust, knoweth not truly how to measure iniquity in sinning, where there is such facility of not sinning; and after: for who can sufficiently declare how wicked a thing it is not to obey in a matter so easy, commanded by so great power, and threatened with so great punishment?*† St Augustine speaketh of Adam's sin, but the same reason holdeth in all sins. For if we balance it truly and not deceitfully, we shall find that

* 2 Cor. iv 17.

† *De Civ. Dei*, XIV, c. 15, No. 1.

every mortal sin is exceeding great in these respects.

First, it is a dreadful thing that the creature should not obey the Creator, seeing that the dignity of the Creator is infinitely distant from the baseness of the creature. The creature is also by nature the servant and the Creator is by nature the Lord, and whatsoever the creature hath, it receiveth from the Creator; but the Creator receiveth nothing from it.

Secondly, although the commandments of the Creator were heavy, yet ought the creature to obey them: but *his commandments are not heavy*.^{*} And our Saviour saith that *his yoke is sweet and burthen light*.[†] How great an offence then is it for worms of the earth not to obey their Creator in so easy a matter!

Thirdly, if God had not threatened the punishment of eternal death unto sinners, men might, perhaps, have excused their sins, but seeing that he hath so often and so plainly threatened it by his prophets and Apostles, what sinner can excuse his contumacy?

Lastly, if the sin of the damned were not eternal, we might marvel why the punishment thereof should be eternal; but seeing that the obstinacy of the damned is eternal,

^{*} 1 John v 3.

[†] Matt. xi 30.

why should we wonder if their punishment be also eternal? And this wilful obstinacy in wickedness, which is both in the damned and in the devils, I say, this perverse will, which is in them averted from God the chief happiness, and shall so for ever remain, maketh holy men more to fear a mortal sin than hell fire.

Hear what Eadmerus, an Englishman, writeth of St Anselm in the second book of his life: *My conscience, saith he, beareth me witness, I lie not, that we have often heard him (St Anselm) to protest by the testimony of truth, that if he might corporally behold of one side the horror of sin, and of the other side the pains of hell, and that of necessity he must be drowned in one of them, he would rather choose hell than sin.* Another thing he used likewise to say, which to some, perhaps, will seem as strange as the former, to wit, *that he had rather have hell without sin than the kingdom of heaven with sin.* If this holy man did both speak and feel these things, for that, being illuminated by God, he knew that sin was more grievous than the pains of hell; how much more will God, who penetrateth the malice, uncleanness, and perverseness of sin to the bottom, truly judge that the punishment which he hath appointed from all eternity is most due thereunto?

Therefore, O my soul, be not deceived, be not seduced, be not like to those *who say they know God, but by their deeds deny him*.^{*} For many have faith in habit, but not in act, like a sword in a scabbard. For if they did actually believe, and believing, did seriously consider that God is faithful and just, and hath indeed prepared most grievous and everlasting punishments, without any mixture of comfort for the wicked: it could not be that they would do the things they do, and drink, as it is said in the book of Job, *iniquity as water*,[†] to wit, so easily, so merrily, and so without fear commit many great sins, as if rewards and not punishments were due unto sinners. But believe thou, I say most assuredly, and believing often remember that God is in this life the *Father of mercies*,[‡] and ready mercifully to pardon the sins of all that truly repent; and that after this life he will become the *God of revenge*,[§] and execute the punishments he hath prepared for them, and by his prophets and Apostles commanded to be preached, and committed to writing for the memory of posterity.

And in so doing it will come to pass that, being lifted up, as it were, with two wings, to wit, the fear of most intolerable punish-

* Tit. i 16.

‡ 2 Cor. i 3.

† Job xv 16.

§ Ps. xciii 1.

ments and hope of most great rewards, thou mayest pass over this life with safety, and come unto the rest of life everlasting. Amen.

Laus Deo qui dedit velle et perficere.

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